News Media Constructions and Policy Implications of School Shootings in the United States.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on 'school shootings' in the United States. Examined here are the news media constructions and public reactions to such incidents, as they pertain to scholarly conceptualisations of fear, moral panics and vulnerability; as well policy responses relating to emergency management in educational institutions and gun-related legislative proposals and actions. Current literature in the field defines 'school shootings' as a particular type of 'spree' or 'mass' killing, involving the murder or attempted murder of students and staff at an education institution. This phenomenon is most prolific in the United States. Two case studies were selected from a list of possible incidents based on their high profile news media coverage, policy impact and infamous natures. The examples used are the school shootings at *Columbine High School*, Colorado (1999) and *Virginia Polytechnic University*, Virginia (2007); although the developments provoked by the 2012 *Sandy Hook Elementary School*, Connecticut shooting are noted throughout. The objectives of the research are: exploring the effect of my two case studies on reshaping or entrenching current moral panic and fear debates; whether the two shootings have transformed emergency management and communication practices; the role that fear plays in the concealed carry on campus movement which arose after the Virginia Tech incident; surmising about which gun-related legislative actions are possible in future.

Employed here is a theoretical framework pertaining to moral panics, fear of crime risk management, and framing of news media and policy. My methodological approach was qualitative in nature. A total of 14 interviews were conducted with experts in gun violence prevention, and emergency management and communication. Ethnographic research was carried out in the form of participant observations at a school safety symposium and a gun reform activism event. Content and critical discourse analyses were employed to assess 728 news media articles, 286 letters to the editor, comments from 32 *YouTube* videos, 14 policy documents and 10 public opinion polls.

My original contribution to knowledge is the examination of policies that have not received much scholarly attention to date: emergency management plans, training, operation and communications to deal with the possibility of a school shooting incident occurring; the 'concealed carry on campus' movement, where students lobby to carry firearms in higher education institutions as a way to negate potential threats. Relatively uncharted territory in fear of crime research was embarked upon with an examination of *YouTube* comments relating to: concerns about attending school; insecurities about the

ability of law enforcement to offer protection in a school shooting scenario. To offer a predictive angle to the research, the current public sentiments, framing strategies being utilised by interest groups, and Supreme Court rulings shaping the future of gun reform were debated. Further avenues for school shooting research are provided.

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Acknowledgements

Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the results of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Selina Doran.

Introduction to Thesis

I. Introduction

In this research project, two case studies[1] of school shootings at *Columbine High School*, Littleton, Colorado (1999) and *Virginia Polytechnic University,* Blacksburg, Virginia (2007) were the prisms through which to view: the influential linkages of news media coverage and public sentiment, relating to the emotional reactions of fear and vulnerability (these will be defined momentarily), school safety and the way firearms are perceived in the United States; policy-making centred on emergency management of school shootings and guns. Fieldwork was carried out in the United States in 2013, with trips to Colorado, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

The aim of this chapter is to set the context for the rest of this document: outlining the research objectives and approach of this study; defining what 'school shooting' means and give brief synopses of the case studies used; providing an overview of the thesis structure.

II. Research Objectives

In the context of this thesis, I sought to interrogate the perceptions of fear, risk and vulnerability surrounding school shootings and youth violence more generally and how this then fed into school emergency management and gun policies. The guiding principles were: What was the nature of fear after Columbine and Virginia Tech? How was this constructed through media narratives and expressed in public reactions? How influential were feelings of fear and vulnerability in motivating policy action pertaining to school emergency management and guns? Overall, this doctoral thesis addresses four research questions:

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[1] I will justify their selection and provide more information about each incident in the chapter following this one.

1. Do constructions and reactions surrounding the Columbine
and Virginia Tech school shootings contribute to or reshape
moral panic and culture of fear debates?

2. To what extent have these two incidents amongst others
resulted in a reimagining of how educational institutions
prepare for and manage school shootings?

3. To what extent is fear entrenched in the concealed carry
on campus movement originating after Virginia Tech?

4. What are the projections for the future relating to gun
reform efforts?

The first research question aims to offer a fuller consideration of the effects of news media coverage by analysing its ability to create a particular climate and provide the necessary conditions for moral panics. With this objective, it is important to define what a climate of fear actually is and how it, in turn, influences perceptions of risk, fear and vulnerability to a school shooting attack. Chapter five contains the answer to this research question; although fear is a prevalent theme throughout the entire thesis, re-emerging particularly in chapter nine.

First of all, sentiment emerging from the 2011 'moral panic' conference maintained that the concept needed further revision and cultivation (Hughes *et al.* 2011). The moral panic framework for analysing findings utilises the work of contemporaneous thinkers like Klocke and Muschert (2010), Garland (2008), Critcher (2011), Cohen's update (2011), and McRobbie and Thornton (1995). Risk and social control literature theorists like Slovic (1987), Sjoberg *et al.* (2005) and Wahlberg and Sjoberg (2000) were also of particular interest to my framework.

The impetus for exploring aspects of 'fear' is driven by claims from theorists like Furedi (2007) that the theorisation of fear is underdeveloped. It seems that 'fear' as the state of 'being afraid' (Gabriel and Greve, 2003: 602) has been applied to a range of not necessarily identical situations. To assess findings, the works of scholars who have begun to explore what 'fear' actually is (Altheide 2002a, 2002b; Bauman 2006; Furedi 2007; Gardner 2008; Glassner 2004; Schneier 2006; Skogan 1993; Tudor 2003) were employed. My intention was to provide a nuanced interpretation of the *quality* and *meaning* of fear (Furedi, 2007: 4-5; emphasis added) — as opposed to just the quantity of it as measured in

opinion polls, which would be presuming an exact definition of fear — and its possible negative consequences.

The second research objective is to explore the 'regulation' stage of moral panic development (Klocke and Muschert 2010) and how the two case studies resulted in the reimagining of emergency management planning, training and communication. These are aspects which have been neglected in school shooting research, so far (Dumitriu 2013). Chapter six looks at weaknesses exposed by the two shootings and subsequent changes made to emergency management plans, training and operational tactics. Chapter seven examines the accusations of blame directed at *Virginia Tech University* officials for the delay in the emergency message sent out to staff and students on the day of the shooting and how these issues were thereafter addressed through institutional and legislative changes.

Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: 3, 16) pointed out that studying narratives is of little value, unless the researcher illuminates the connection between dominant ones and the policies which prevailed, so the link between discourses and policy-making is the key focus here. Of particular interest was the connection between the 'blame' evident in discourses of news media content and letters to the editor with changes to law enforcement tactics following the Columbine incident and crisis communication after the Virginia Tech shooting. The objective of this is to demonstrate how framing is a way to present aspects of reality in order to achieve support for a particular policy solution (Fischer 2003).

Findings will be located within risk management literature (Garland 1997; Furedi 2008, 2009; Heath *et al.* 2009; Power 2004) and theories relating to crisis communication and managing reputations (Beniot 1997; Coombs 2012; Reynolds and Seeger 2005). These two chapters intend to advance the current literature by looking at these concepts through the lens of school shootings — in particular, the effect of Columbine on K-12 schools[2] and of Virginia Tech on higher education institutes — to substantiate the claim that certain events can reshape the conceptualisation of crisis management.

The third research question will follow the trajectory of the movement motivated by the Virginia Tech shooting: 'concealed carry on campus,' which is driven by college and

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[2] This is a term commonly used to refer to mandatory schooling: kindergarten, elementary, middle and high schools.

university students who want to carry firearms for protection against potential school shooters; also examined is the extent to which fear is driving it. The findings are documented in chapter nine.

Studying ideology means that "one can raise certain questions about the ways in which belief systems prevent or promote social change" (Lukes 1977: 149), for the meanings people ascribe to guns influenced policy debates. My original intention was to document the policy changes after both shootings; however, following some initial scoping it became clear that the carry on campus movement was something which required further exploration. As will be outlined in chapter one, the policy responses to Columbine focused on children and guns, alongside closing the loophole which allowed the perpetrators to procure their weapons: it is perhaps axiomatic that Columbine would be linked with those particular policy proposals. Notably, Virginia Tech occurred in a post 9/11 context when the link between guns and protection was heightened, paving the way for a movement that focuses on concealed carry as a way to negate the threat of a shooter at a college or university.

Findings in chapter nine are located within 'fear of crime' literature (Farrell *et al.* 2009; Ferraro 1995; Ferraro and LaGrange 1987; Gabriel and Greve 2003; Gray *et al.* 2011; Hollway and Jefferson 1997, 2000; Jackson 2004, 2009; Jackson and Gray 2010; Stanko 2000). Exploring the role of fear in the concealed carry on campus movement further looks at social activities relating to the emotion as recommended by Tudor (2003) and advances the understanding of fear provided in the answer to the first research question. Interestingly, through the process of analysing *YouTube* comments, etiological elements[3]arose which could be driving the 'concealed carry on campus movement': a lack of trust in the ability of law enforcement to offer protection from school shooters and a sense of vulnerability: a concept linked with the emotions of victimisation and anxiety in relation to fear of a particular threat (Stanko, 2000: 13).

The final research objective is to provide a critical examination of the particular policy changes recommended by my gun-related research participants to eradicate school shootings and whether legislative change is possible in the current political context. The purpose of this question is to offer a projective dimension to the thesis by assessing about what policy change is possible in future. Chapter ten outlines the proposals of

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[3] The investigation or attribution of the cause or reason for something, often expressed in terms of historical or mythical explanation.

interviewees; whilst chapter eleven surmises about whether or not gun regulation is possible.

Gun violence prevention interest groups have the potential to shape the 'policy' and 'problem' streams, by framing issues in certain ways that are translatable into policy outcomes (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005; Gabrielson 2005). In order for this to happen, the landscape shaping the possibilities for change must be interrogated: the Supreme Court rulings that put some constitutional parameters on the debate; the feelings of the public when it comes to gun policies. I will also debate alternative ways to frame the gun policy debate in a way that is compelling and depoliticised.

In order to analyse how school shootings and issues like gun regulation are framed in the subsets of data appropriated in this study, I will utilise 'framing' literature by Aaroe (2011), Entman (1993, 2007), Gross (2008) and Iyengar (1991); whilst keeping in mind Entman's (1993: 56) warning that frames could be interpreted in ways that contrast the dominant meaning. Literature surrounding ideology and power (Fairclough 1989, 1995a, 1995b; Lukes, 1974/2005; van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b) and policy-making (Anderson 2003; Kingdon 1994/2003) is drawn upon here. Recommendations of other scholars in the field of gun-related research are also used.

III. Contribution to Current Research

It is hoped that with the particular research objectives selected, this thesis will contribute to the current body of literature on school shootings — especially in relation to studies already conducted on the two case studies (see section below) — and add to current debates in strands of criminology and sociology, as well as media and education studies.

This thesis uses a criminological lens, first of all, to offer a cultural perspective on fear and moral panics, security and youth violence. Guiding my thoughts are the findings of other theorists (Altheide 2009; Brooks *et al.* 2000; Burns and Crawford 1999; Fox and Savage 2009; Killingbeck 2001) that the news media has distorted the risk of school shootings. My thesis will focus mainly on *representations* of fear in the news media and the exhibition of *feelings* of vulnerability in public discourses of letters and *YouTube* discussions. At present, there have only been a handful of studies (Böckler and Seeger 2013; Lindgren 2011) on the connection between discourses on *YouTube* and how people make sense of school shootings.

The main theoretical framework of this thesis is grounded in sociology and media studies. As a research subject, sociology focuses on the collective phenomenon of society, i.e. institutions, groups and so forth (Hughes and Sharrock, 1990: 53). A more specific definition of social structures is provided by Mills (1959: 134): "the combination of institutions classified according to the function each performs." It is this emphasis on patterns within society that forms the core of sociology and is relevant to Mills' (1959) notion of the 'sociological imagination': looking beyond one's immediate situation to see the influence of the larger (hence 'macro') social context. In the case of my thesis, this relates to the ways in which: the news media construct stories, policy is debated and implemented, the public make sense of school shootings. Since school shootings, in the U.S., are rare events that do not directly affect a large portion of people, the representations in media discourse are the primary source of information for the public to attempt to make sense of the phenomenon (Muschert, 2013: 267) — this highlights the pertinence of news media to school shooting research.

With its examination of print news media sources in the U.S, therefore, my thesis intends to add to current media research. As a starting point, interested readers are directed to sources like Chermak 1995; Hall *et al.* 1978; Schudson 2003). The *Glasgow Media Group* (1980) or individual authors (for instance, Eldridge 1995 or Philo 2007, 2008) have conducted a lot of work in this area, mainly looking at international and industrial conflicts. The fact that "every narrative account of reality necessarily presents some things and not others" (Schudson, 2003: 35-36) means news media offers rich territory for sociological inquiries like mine.

A number of studies (Chyi and McCombs 2004; Lawrence and Mueller 2003; Maguire *et al.* 2002; Muschert 2007, 2009; Wondemaghen 2013) have looked at broadcast and print news media coverage of school shootings. It is perhaps axiomatic that, with its visual nature, broadcast news is more conducive to creating a climate of fear. With that in mind, I thought it would be interesting to focus solely on the potential of *language* in print news to cultivate similar conditions. My study, therefore, will not focus on broadcast news or the visual dimension of news (including photographs) to limit the variables and allow me to focus solely on linguistic framing.

The linkage of news media and policy framing of school shootings has been explored by scholars (Birkland and Lawrence 2009; Burns and Crawford 1999; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001; Lawrence and Birkland 2004; Muschert 2013; Wondemaghen 2013). A particular focus has been placed on the security measures implemented in educational institutions after school shootings (Bondü *et al.* 2013; Brooks *et al.* 2000; Fox and Savage

2009; Rasmussen and Johnson 2008); for that reason, I did not conceive of any additional slants to add to the debate about target-hardening and zero-tolerance policies. By contrast, emergency management and communication offered an original angle given the only comprehensive study available to debate was Dumitriu's (2013) study using eleven global case studies to assess the process of crisis management in a school shooting scenario.

Throughout the research process, I had in mind Bottom's (2000) integrated theory-research method. This approach intends to counteract the limitations of the grounded-theory approach, conceptualised by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to diminish the 'embarrassing gap' between theory and research through constant comparative analysis throughout the data collection and analysis process. Bottoms (2000: 44) makes the following recommendations: acknowledging empirical research materials will be entangled with some degree of theoretical context; engaging in the cultivation and testing of hypotheses throughout the research process, and being open to findings which may not intersect with them; acknowledging that theory formulation is a 'process'; appreciating the relevance of concepts throughout all stages of the research. Adopted throughout the research conducted for this thesis was the continuing process of theory refinement: appreciating the importance and limitations of concepts; utilising the appropriate types of sources and research methods; being open to new data which may challenge pre-conceived result expectations.

IV. What is a 'School Shooting?'

The definition of what a 'school shooting' is has to be further explicated to separate it from all other gun-related incidents occurring at schools or school-related events in the United States. A key conceptual problem in school shooting research is defining the phenomenon: differing interpretations affect case studies selected, the frequency of incidents, and comparisons between studies (Bondu *et al.*, 2013: 343). For this thesis, I will utilise the definition commonly appropriated in other research studies and news media discourse.

To begin with, I wish to explain more about how 'school shootings' and perpetrators of these acts compare with other types of organised violence. School shootings fit under the rubric of 'spree' or 'mass' shootings (Böckler *et al.* 2013; Larkin 2009). In public

discourses, 'mass shootings' are generally defined as a shooting attack killing five or more people (see *TIME*, April 2007). Historically, this type of crime originated in United States in 'going postal' attacks in postal offices and later on 'workplace massacres' in places of employment (see Ames 2007). The individualistic culture of the U.S. is said to be an attributing factor to its proclivity to mass shootings, as other countries with high levels of gun ownership (e.g. Switzerland, Norway) have fewer incidents because their communities are tight-knit and socially bonded (Squires 2012).

Profiles of specific violent offences are generally developed by the *Federal Bureau of Investigation* to allow suspect lists to be narrowed down and for key warning signs to be identified (Douglas and Olshaken, 1999: 57-58, 157). The 'spree killer' is a perpetrator who kills or attempts to kill numerous victims in the shortest period of time, often perceived by them to be a 'solution' to their problems. Attacks are usually planned well in advance and documented in journals. Perpetrators generally tend to commit suicide after their attack either by killing themselves or provoking law enforcement to shoot them (known as 'suicide by cop') (Douglas and Olshaken 1999; Kelly 2012; Lankford 2013a, 2013b; Levin and Madfis 2009).

The 'school shooter' is a specific type of 'spree killer' with particular commonalities: most had experienced romantic rejection of some kind (Leary *et al.* 2003; Kimmel and Mahler 2003); the symptoms of 'depersonalisation' [of victims] and 'superiority narcissism' were evident in past attackers (Langman 2009; Twenge and Campbell 2003); 61% of attackers suffered from depression and 78% attempted suicide or had suicidal thoughts (Vossekuil *et al.*, 2004: 22).

Turning now to look at the specifics of the 'school shooting' definition, the term 'school' includes elementary, middle and high schools, as well as further and higher education institutes (Harding *et al.*, 2002, 177-178). I draw upon the descriptions utilised in other research studies (Böckler *et al.* 2013; Harding *et al.* 2002; Larkin 2009; Muschert 2007, 2013; Newman *et al.* 2004; Newman and Fox 2009; Vossekuil *et al.* 2004): shootings perpetrated by current or former students of the school as an act of retaliation against the institution itself; occurring on a school-related location, including off-campus ones used for a school event (e.g. a dance held at a community hall); some victims may be targeted for a perceived wrong, whilst others are chosen at random or for their symbolic significance (e.g. representing a particular social group within the school). Notably, gang violence, revenge killings over a relationship breaking down, drug deals gone wrong, or

simply students bringing a gun to school for attention represent a different type of violence and are thus excluded from the definition (Böckler *et al.* 2013; Harding *et al.*, 2002; Larkin 2009).

There has been some debate whether this should encompass external attackers, such as parents, teachers or other adults with ties to the school. Dumitriu (2013) and Muschert (2013) include such 'school invasion' cases in their studies; whereas, Böckler *et al.* (2013) and Larkin (2009) argued that these perpetrators are not 'school shooters' and instead fit under the definitions of 'classic rampage' (mass shooting) or 'workplace violence' (if an employee at the school). For the purposes of this study, I will acknowledge that 'school shootings' can include external attackers who have some link to the school, such as the Dunblane, Scotland (1996) and the Sandy Hook, Connecticut (2012) shootings. As will be explicated momentarily, Dunblane is particularly relevant to this thesis: growing up in Scotland, I experienced with the changes made to school security procedures and the blanket ban on private handgun ownership in the UK (see Squires 2000).

Even within the specified definition of 'school shootings,' there are notable differences between middle/high school and college/university perpetrators (Newman and Fox 2009). Firstly, shootings on higher education institutions are rarer, although these have steadily increased from 2002-2008 totalling six incidents (Newman and Fox, 2009: 1299-1300). School shooters at middle and high schools tend to be 'avenging' against intense social isolation and bullying caused by the high school culture and hierarchy; whilst college and university perpetrators are motivated by academic and financial pressures (Fox and Levin 2010; Muschert 2013). Further, Newman and Fox (2009) made the argument that the mental illness conditions, social isolation and hostility towards peers, evident in the high and middle school cases are even more pronounced in the case of the campus shooters (ages range of twenty-three to sixty-two). Another noticeable difference was that middle and high school shooters are mainly Caucasian males; whilst a number of campus school shootings have involved immigrants or ethnic minorities (Newman and Fox, 2009: 1304).

V. Personal Interest in Topic

The phenomenon of school shootings was the topic selected for a number of reasons. At the time of the Dunblane (1996) tragedy in Scotland, I was a primary school student who

became afraid to attend to school for fear of a school shooting; this was exacerbated when my teacher would prepare the class for a potential attack, questioning where they would hide and go for help. I also witnessed the wider changes made to school security policies and gun laws in a post-Dunblane context and found it interesting that such an atypical event could have a momentous impact. When Virginia Tech occurred, I was an undergraduate student at university, so I could relate to how terrifying an experience it must have been; although I did not have the same fear of it occurring at my university, because I had realised how rare mass shootings were in the UK by that stage.

Furthermore, after completing an undergraduate degree in journalism and sociology and a master of research degree in social research, my interests and knowledge lies in looking at the structural processes in society and assessing the production of news media content. I commenced my PhD at the *University of Strathclyde*, with the intention of conducting a sociological inquiry into the phenomenon of school shootings and the role the news media plays. When the sociology department at the university was closed down, I made the decision to transfer to the *University of Glasgow*. Although I had a background in media research, I was drawn to the *Scottish Centre of Crime and Justice Research*, believing that this would open up further avenues for my research by allowing me to work with criminological experts. Criminological literature and concepts have henceforth become more of a focus and shifted the direction of my research into one of the policy responses and public reactions to an atypical but horrifying crime like a school shooting.

The exploration of another culture and how a different country deals with the threat of incidents are horrific as school shootings means this research journey has been particularly insightful for me. The stark differences between policy responses in Scotland to the UK's only school shooting incident, Dunblane — the increase in CCTV surveillance in schools and the ban on private ownership of handguns (see Squires 2000) — and those to the numerous incidents in the United States — some of which have been outlined here — have been really compelling to explore. I feel this thesis is something which has taken my childhood fear and hopefully turned it into something productive.

VI. Roadmap of Thesis

This thesis is divided into three. The first section 'The Process and Framework' seeks to establish the contextual, theoretical and methodological dimensions of this research project

in four chapters. Chapter one justifies the two case studies chosen and provides a descriptive overview of the incidents and perpetrators. Chapter two interrogates how this study will contribute to current literature in the field and the theoretical paradigms that will be used to analyse the findings of this thesis. In chapter three, I will justify the research samples selected. Chapter four documents the epistemological approach taken, the ethical dimensions of the research; as well as carrying out content analysis, critical discourse analysis, interviews and ethnographic research and analysing the data collected.

The next section 'Vulnerability, Safety and Schools' contains three chapters with the results of my empirical research. Chapter five examines news media and public discourses (letters and *YouTube* comments) to get inside the emotional components of risk, fear, vulnerability and terror. The next two chapters (six and seven) explore how vulnerability and fear impact upon policies related to managing school shootings. Chapter six looks at the impact each case study had on the emergency management planning and training of school shootings. The other component of 'emergency communication' is explored in chapter seven, with the Virginia Tech case study being the prime focus.

The final section of this thesis 'Gun-Related Sentiment and Action' groups together a background context chapter and a further three chapters presenting research results. Chapter eight gives a descriptive overview of the following: a history of gun legislation in the United States and the opposing sides of the debate; the role of interest groups in the process of shaping gun legislation; the Supreme Court rulings in 2008 and 2010, which have set some legal parameters on gun regulation. Chapter nine uses findings to explore the origins, development and possible future of the 'concealed carry on campus' movement. Chapter ten questions whether the current political and public terrain allows for further gun regulation, with the focus being on the Supreme Court rulings and the current public sentiment around possible gun-related action. Lastly, chapter eleven discusses the feasibility of the prescriptive proposals suggested by gun-related interviewees to reduce the possibility of school shootings.

The coda of this thesis will bring all its findings together in a concluding chapter numbered twelve; the limitations of this thesis and possible avenues for future research are also explored in this chapter. Concluding the overall document are the reference list and collection of appendices. Throughout the entire thesis are footnotes containing additional information and photographs[4] for reference.

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[4] Photographs are taken from news reports, as well as the *I Love U Guys, No More Names* and *LiveSafe* websites, 'A Columbine Site' (n.d.) and news media reports; whilst others were taken whilst on fieldwork. I will provide references beside each photograph.

PART ONE: THE PROCESS AND THE FRAMEWORK

1. Case Studies and Recent Developments

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a descriptive synopsis of the key contextual facets shaping the research of this thesis: the case studies used as prisms through which to view news media content and policy responses; the historical context of gun legislation in the United States; recent political developments shaping gun legislation. I will firstly provide a descriptive overview of the two case studies and their effects on gun legislation to put them into context[5]. Secondly, I will detail the process of selecting my two case studies, describing their relevance to the news media and policy debates that my thesis explores. This chapter will finish off by looking at the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting and its implications for policy.

1.1 Case Studies

This section is divided into two parts for each case study. I will provide a descriptive overview of each incident, with a particular emphasis on any notable aspects of it and the actions of the perpetrators, alongside a brief synopsis of the public criticism of institutional responses to the shootings and changes made to gun laws after the shootings.

1.1.1 Columbine High School[6]

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[5] The justification and process for selecting those two case studies will be outlined in chapter three 'Research Sample.'

[6] Material for this sub-section comes from the Cullen (2009) *Columbine* book, the documentary *Covering Columbine* (Moritz 2000) and the timeline from the 'Governor's Commission Report' (2001).

The 'Columbine'[7] shooting was an incident in Littleton, Colorado (20th April 1999), perpetrated by two students at the school, Dylan Klebold (17) and Eric Harris (18). This event resulted in the deaths of twelve students, one teacher and both shooters. The two shooters had planned the attack months in advance and carefully constructed drawings, maps, journals, websites, and videotapes with the intention of sending these to four news stations; they never managed to send their materials off, although these were recovered after the shooting and subsequently analysed. The perpetrators constructed bombs and procured firearms (see figure 1 below and over the next page): two 9mm shotguns which they sawed down to make them concealable, a Hi-Point Carbine rifle, a 9mm semiautomatic carbine (commonly called a 'Tec-9'), and 9mm ammunition clips. Their original intention was to kill as any people in the school as possible by letting off homemade propane bombs and thereafter shooting any survivors.

Hi-Point carbine rifle

Sawed-off pump-action shotgun

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[7] This shooting will generally be referred to as 'Columbine' from now on.

Tec-9 semi-automatic handgun

Double-barrelled sawed-off shotgun

Figure 1: Firearms used in Columbine Shooting[8]

On the day of the attack, their bombs planted in the school failed to detonate properly. The perpetrators carried the firearms, handheld bombs, and seven knives, so they changed their tactics to attack people face-to-face at the school. At 11:15am, outside the school, they deliberately killed a female student that they knew and shot at students, killing one boy and wounding several others. The school resource officer, who had been on his lunch break at this time, received a 911 call ten minutes after this initial attack. The perpetrators carried out the following actions: shooting a teacher, Dave Sanders, who had gone to warn students and later died of his injuries; joking with each other whilst taunting and executing students in the library as they hid under tables; ignited pipe bombs as they wandered around the school; exchanged gunfire with law enforcement officers outside; and wounded many students and staff, with some being left paralysed from their injuries. The massacre lasted until 12:08pm, when the two perpetrators killed themselves with a shot to the heads.

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[8] These images were taken from 'A Columbine Site' (n.d.).

Figure 2: Front page coverage of Columbine Shooting[9]

This attack was not the first school shooting perpetrated by two students. In 1998, two middle school students aged thirteen and eleven years old planned and carried out a similar massacre in Westside Middle School, Jonesboro, Arkansas. The two shooters triggered the fire alarm and shot people as they ran from the building, killing four students, one teacher and wounding others. Arguably, this event might be described as even more disturbing because the perpetrators were much younger than Harris and Klebold. The main noticeable difference with Columbine was the presentation of the news story. The broadcast news stations had footage of the scenes as they unfolded: SWAT teams entering the building,

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[9] I took this photograph of the front page coverage in the archives of the *Newseum* (a museum examining the history of the U.S. media) in Washington, D.C. Original credit goes to *Rocky Mountain News* for the photograph featured on the front page.

students jumping from windows, gunshot victims covered in blood, children running out the school with their hands on their head, and survivors hugging one another and sobbing (see Moritz 2000). The 911 call recorded in the library as ten students were killed, as well as eyewitness accounts from survivors, gave an indication of the horrifying nature of the shooting attack. This is something I will explore in more detail in chapter five.

Another noticeable element of the Columbine shooting was the criticism it provoked of law enforcement response. The law enforcement officers stationed outside Columbine went through the lengthy process of 'securing the perimeter' to stop the perpetrators escaping and of escorting students out after searching each one for weapons. Legal scholar Kopel (2000, 2009) accused the police officers of putting their own lives before the students and claimed that 'establishing a perimeter' is not the correct tactic to stop an active shooter. Issues contended in the public sphere more generally were whether: teacher, William 'Dave' Sanders, who was shot in the chest and survived for four hours afterwards, could have been saved had medical teams been 'allowed' to enter the school; and a more expeditious law enforcement response could have prevented the bulk of the carnage, which took place in the library and resulted in the deaths of ten students.

On the contrary, a report by *Jefferson County* (n.d.) provided a justification of sorts for the delayed response at Columbine. The SWAT officers had to form an 'ad hoc' team of police from different agencies with no previous contact. Other difficulties facing the teams were: incorrect Intel being provided, such as there being snipers, hostages and up to eight gunmen in the building; out-dated information about the building layout; most officers did not have their tactical equipment with them. Inside the school, officers faced hazardous conditions of flashing strobe lights, overflowing sprinklers, and fire alarms wailing. Chapters six and nine will respectively deal with how this criticism of law enforcement has affected operational tactics relating to 'active shooters' and progressed to a sentiment of distrust in the abilities of police.

Following the Columbine shooting, Clinton's administration put together a package involving measures that restrict access to guns to children: background checks at gun shows; penalties for adults whose children procure their firearms for harmful intentions; increasing the age for ownership to twenty-one; safety locks on guns; a three day waiting period on background checks; banning violent young offenders from owning guns (*The*

White House, May 1999). In the end, Clinton's proposal was 'hung up' in Congress six months after it was introduced and then failed when the Republican-led House voted against Clinton's bill fifty-one to forty-seven.

With the failure of Clinton's bill in Congress, the issue of 'closing the gun show loophole' in Colorado by voter initiative emerged. The loophole is part of the 'Brady Bill' (1994) (more on this in chapter eight) allowing private sales, such as those at gun shows, to forego background checks, with it only being illegal if the seller has 'reasonable cause' to suspect the buyer is a prohibited person (Wintemute, 2013a: 96-97).The Colorado-based interest group *Sane Alternatives to the Firearm Epidemic* — this is now defunct — which had the father of a Columbine victim working as a lobbyist, gathered signatures to put 'closing the gun show loophole' on the public ballot. Interest groups generally place items on the ballot to circumvent state legislature and governors to write the policy stance of the group into law (Rozell *et al.*, 2006: 148). At the State of Union address, 'then' President Clinton referred to Columbine and honoured victim, Daniel Mauser; as well as giving Daniel's father, Tom Mauser, who sat in the audience, a round of applause, commending him for his work with *SAFE*: "I pray that his courage and wisdom will at long last move this Congress to make common sense gun legislation the very next order of business" (cited in *NBC News* 2000). Clinton also attended the *SAFE* rally in Denver and told the group "I admire you. I support you. Don't quit until you win" (cited in Crowder, April 2000). *SAFE* had further endorsement from Colorado's Republican Governor, Bill Owens. As it transpired, this measure was passed in Colorado in 2000. *SAFE*'s lobbyist, Tom Mauser, attributed this to the Columbine shooting being on voters' minds: "This [Colorado] is a Western, conservative, typically pro-gun state. When you can win 70% of voters, that's a lot" (cited in *NBC News* April 2000).

1.1.2 Virginia Polytechnic and State University[10]

The 'Virginia Tech'[11] attack was a shooting spree in *Blacksburg*, Virginia (16th April 2007) perpetrated by a current student at that time, Seung-Hui Cho, who murdered thirty-two people and injured dozens of others before he then ended his own life. Just over two

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[10] Material for this subsection comes from analyses of news media reports and the timeline in chapter three of the *Virginia Tech Review Panel* (2007/2009) report.

[11] This shooting spree is commonly known as the 'Virginia Tech' attack and I will generally refer to it as this throughout this thesis.

months before the massacre, Cho made plans: he procured a .22 calibre Walther P22 handgun and a 9mm Glock 19 Handgun (see figure 3 below), both of which had semi-automatic firing capabilities, as well as many ammunition magazines, a hunting knife and chains; he practiced shooting at an indoor range; he recorded his 'manifesto' tapes at a local hotel. The night before the attack, there were reports of an Asian male loitering in Norris Hall and the doors were chained shut: there is the theory that it was Cho 'practising' before the main event the next day.

Walther handgun

Glock handgun

Figure 3: Firearms used in Virginia Tech Shooting[12]

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[12] The first photograph of the Walther P22 was taken from: Alfano, Sean. (2007) 'Va. Tech Killer Bought 2nd Gun Online' *CBS News*, 19 April. *http://www.cbsnews.com/news/va-tech-killer-bought-2nd-gun-online/*. The second was retrieved from: Liebelson, Dana (2012) '6 Things the NRA Didn't Blame for Mass Shootings.' *Mother Jones*, 21 December. *http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/6-things-nra-didnt-blame-mass-shootings.*

On the day of the attack, Cho's attack was two-fold in nature. At 7:15am, Cho firstly shot student, Emily Hilscher, in her dorm room in the West Ambler Johnston (WAJ) student halls and thereafter killed the Resident Advisor, Christopher Clark, who was in the room next door and had come to investigate the noise. Cho then departed the crime scene, leaving behind bloody footprints and shell castings. Following the first two murders, Cho went back to his room and prepared for the second and final part of his attack by changing clothes, applying his acne cream and brushing his teeth, closing his email account; he also mailed his manifesto, consisting of twenty-seven video clips, an eight-hundred word document and forty-three captioned photos, to broadcast news station *NBC*.

At 9:40am, the most devastating part of Cho's attack was carried out in Norris Hall where he went on to murder thirty people. To begin with, he chained all three entrances shut and put a note on them saying a bomb would go off if the chains were removed: this suggests that he was keen to exceed the death toll set by the previous 'worst'[13]school shooting by delaying law enforcement intervention. The attack was methodological and brutal in nature, with multiple shots fired into each victim. The medical examiner revealed that the thirty-two murdered by Cho had more than one hundred bullet wounds. Likewise, doctors treating survivors found their injuries to include at least three bullet wounds each. This corroborated what survivor, O'Dell, said: "There were [sic] way more gunshots than there were people in that room." He tended to shoot the lecturers first in a head shot and then executed the students row by row shooting multiple times. He thereafter returned to classrooms and repeated the same attack pattern. Survivors said Cho never spoke during the attack. The end of the attack came when Cho heard the shotgun blast of law enforcement breaking through the doors he had chained shut, he killed himself with a shot to the head, denying them the chance to arrest him and/or shoot him: this is a common pattern in school/mass shootings (see Lankford 2013b). At 10:08am, Cho's body was discovered by police found amongst his victims in classroom 211 (which had the highest number of deceased victims) with two weapons near his body, no identification on him, and what appeared to be a self-inflicted gunshot.

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[13] I put this in scare quotes because there tends to be an immediate link in news media content about the 'worst' school shooting being the one with the highest death toll.
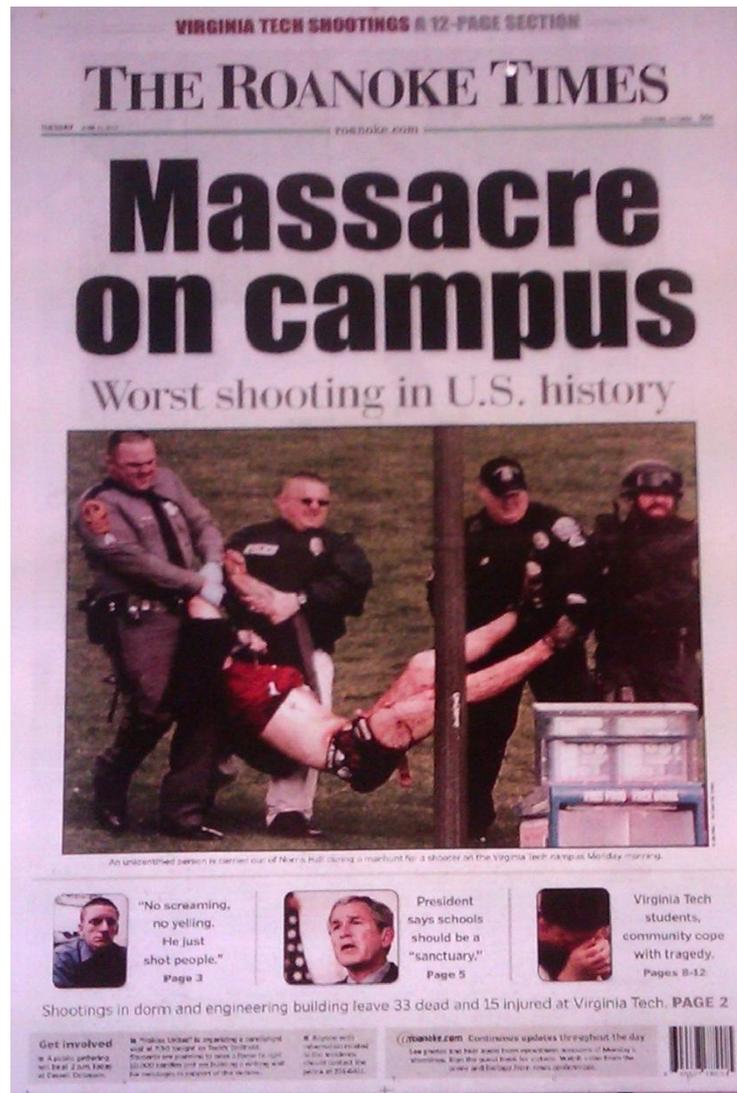
Figure 4: Front page coverage of Virginia Tech Shooting[14]

What was noticeable about this shooting apart from the high death toll was the criticism of *Virginia Tech University*'s police department (*VTPD*) and policy group (*VTPG).* Shortly after the dorm murders, the *VTPD* received a phone call about the noise and went to investigate. The *VTPD* made a number of erroneous presumptions about the dorm attack: it was an isolated shooting based on a 'domestic dispute'; the female student's boyfriend was identified as the main 'person of interest' (i.e. a possible suspect or key witness) in the murder investigation, because he had driven her to the dorm before she was killed and was also a gun owner; presuming that the shooter had left campus and hence was no longer a threat.

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[14] This photograph was once again taken by me at the front page archives in the *Newseum* in Washington, D.C. Original credit for the front page photograph goes to *The Roanoke Times.*

At 7:57am, the *VTPD* informed the 'Policy Group' (*VTPG*) about what had happened and to be cautious, but failed to advise them of any immediate concrete actions to take, such as the cancellation of classes. The *VTPG* then discussed which course of action to take, with them being circumspect about unnecessarily causing a panic, given there had been a previous false alarm in 2006 about an escaped convict holding people hostage in the university. The *VTPG* did not send out an emergency alert to staff and students about the dorm shooting until 9:26am, which was twenty-one minutes after the first class at 9:05am had begun. This resulted in a lawsuit being filed against the university. Chapter seven will explore the implications of this shooting on emergency communication policy responses.

The fact that the Virginia Tech perpetrator, Seung-Hui Cho, *legally* procured the semiautomatic weapons he used during the attack — ordering one weapon from the internet and collecting at a local pawnshop and buying another at a store— highlighted flaws in mental health criteria (Spitzer, 2012: xi). In Virginia, gun purchases must comply with both federal and state law. The federal-level "Gun Control Act" (1968) prohibited Cho from purchasing firearms: Cho had been issued with a temporary detention order a year and a half prior to the shooting, where a Virginia magistrate found him to present "an imminent danger to self or others as a result of mental illness" (Isikoff 2007). Under Virginia law, however, because Cho was only 'temporarily detained' rather than 'committed,' he was able to circumvent the federal restrictions and be eligible to buy firearms (*VTRP*, 2007: 71-72). Adhering to the *Virginia Tech Review Panel* (2007: 75) recommendation that "anyone found to be a danger to themselves or others by a court-ordered review should be entered…regardless of whether they voluntarily agreed to treatment," the Governor of Virginia changed the law using executive order.

The 'Report to the President' document (Leavitt *et al.* 2007) also recommended to the federal-level Bush administration that an 'accurate' and 'complete' *NICS* system was pertinent to ensuring current federal guns laws prohibiting persons are effective. The authors of this report discovered that some states could not share information about such persons with the *NICS* because of their privacy laws preventing them from doing so. Prescribed federal-level action was for the *US Department of Justice* to provide information to *NICS* about banned persons and to offer states guidance and encouragement to submit records (Leavitt *et al.*, 2007: 10-11).

This paved the way for the re-introduction of a bill which failed in 2003: the purpose of it was to provide financial incentives and assistance for states to provide records to the federal 'National Instant Criminal Background Check' system. The bill was co-sponsored by Representative John D. Dingell, who is a board member of the *NRA* and typically opposed to gun regulations. There was further support from the *NRA* — with its executive director, Wayne LaPierre, arguing "We're strongly in support of putting those records in the system."

The president then signed into law the 'NICS Improvement Amendments Act' (2008), strengthening the Attorney General's ability to procure information from federal agencies and departments regarding prohibited persons, requiring for annual reports to be provided to Congress, and authorising incentives for states, tribes and court systems to provide records for the NICS. Financial grants totalling almost forty million dollars were divided up and awarded to twenty-five states from 2009-2011. Consequently, in 2011, the number of records in the *NICS* index increased by 41% to 7.2 million (Cuthbertson, 2011: 12-13).

1.2 Selecting Case Studies

A case study represents the unit of analysis through which the research will be assessed (Yin, 1992/2006: 85). Considering this, a case study approach is a research *frame*, outlining its parameters (Stoecker, 2006: 150). A number of studies on school shootings (e.g. Fox and Savage 2009; *National Research Council* 2003; Newman *et al.* 2004; Newman and Fox 2009) have successfully used a case study approach. An important design issue is deciding which case studies are to be used (*National Research Council* 2003).

The first selection method used in this thesis was narrowing down the sample of potential case studies. The steps involved in this process are: deciding upon the phenomenon being studied; selecting single or multiple cases, specifying the criteria for this selection; appropriating the most relevant data collection method (Yin, 1992/2006: 85-86). When Böckler *et al.* (2013) charted the cases of student attackers only from 1925 to 2011, there had been seventy-six cases in the United States, compared to a combined total of forty-four for the rest of the world. Given the majority of incidents and the most policy reform have occurred in the United States, I am only focusing on events there.[15] The

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[15] Böckler *et al.* (2013: 10) found that the three countries with the highest numbers of school shootings respectively are: United States, Germany and Canada. I did consider comparing and contrasting the policy responses of these countries; however, given the complexity of various policy systems and culture of each country, the focus had to be on one country to keep the research manageable. Exploring the policy responses

definition of what constitutes a school shooting (for a fuller discussion, see introduction) is used to narrow the potential sample of cases: events occurring at a school or school-related location; attacks involving the killing of multiple victims by firearms; shooters are students or former students of the school who attempt to get revenge against the institution itself. I did not focus on 'near misses' (i.e. school shooting plans that have been thwarted before their enactment), which other researchers (for instance, Daniels and Page 2013; Larkin 2009) have done in the past.

With a large number of incidents meeting the definition of school shootings specified above, the potential sample needed narrowing down. First of all, cases matching this description were selected from the archive (*U.S. News and World Report* 2008[16]) of all school shootings from 1966-2008. As a process of elimination, selected were the ten school shooters that were analysed in the text *Why Kids Kill* (Langman 2009) because of the large amount of information available about them in comparison to other incidents. Most school shooting studies have studied the Columbine (1999) and Virginia Tech (2007) incidents because they are the most 'infamous' (Muschert, 2013: 270). The other side of the argument could be that research needs to be conducted on the school shootings which have not received much scholarly attention thus far. In the case of this thesis, however, with its emphasis on news media coverage and policy reform, it was more appropriate for the most highly publicised cases to be used. It also allows for a more extensive examination of the various dimensions of the case studies, a practice recommended by De Vaus (2006). Following this process should help to eliminate, to some extent, the two problems generally associated with a case study approach: possible bias in selecting the cases, which could damage internal validity; difficulties in generalising from the findings, which impacts upon external validity (Stoecker, 2006: 144).

After comparing and contrasting school shootings using Langman's (2009) analyses and wider reading on fear, moral panics and school shootings, the highly publicised incidents at Columbine High School (1999) and Virginia Tech University (2007) were selected from the factsheet sample because they exemplify the issues being examined with this thesis: fear, managing school shootings, and gun reform.

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of other countries and possibly comparing these to the findings of this thesis could be an avenue for future research.

[16] The selection of case studies had to be done at the beginning of the research process and this list was current when the researcher commenced this thesis (late 2009). Later school shootings like Sandy Hook (2012) are acknowledged and discussed throughout this thesis.

To begin with, the Columbine school shooting created a paradigm shift in news media coverage pertaining to school shootings — and thus its relevance both nationally and internationally — which meant it required additional coverage and alternative frames of news coverage from those previously used (Altheide 2009; Lawrence and Birkland 2004). There is a general consensus amongst scholars (Kostinsky *et al.* 2001; Larkin 2009; Muschert 2007, 2009) that the Columbine incident 'typified' school shootings incidents in general. The shooting at Columbine High is said by Altheide (2009: 1355) to have had the biggest effect on public perceptions on school shootings:

> Just as the 'falling trade towers' in New York City came to symbolise the 9/11 attacks, Columbine came to be associated with virtually every act of gun violence that would occur on school grounds throughout the United States and, in many cases, throughout the world

References to the incident were shortened by the news media to simply 'Columbine,' where the term came to represent school security concerns and youth violence (Altheide, 2009: 1358). The incorporation of the term into the lexicon was evident when Muschert *et al.* (in press) termed the trend of extremely rare but horrific events influencing public policy 'The Columbine Effect.' It was also found that seven out of nine school shootings occurring in the United States between 1999 and 2007 were influenced by Columbine; whilst six out of the eleven occurring elsewhere in the world during this time period also referenced the incident (Larkin, 2009: 1314-1316).

The shooting at Virginia Tech, which resulted in thirty-two murders and the death of the perpetrator, is considered the most 'lethal' school shooting in the U.S. and globally (Newman and Fox 2009). The incident resulted in a reassessment of school security in higher education institutes throughout the U.S. (Fox and Savage 2009; Rasmussen and Johnson 2008). The year after Virginia Tech led to the highest concentration of cases worldwide with nine in total occurring (Böckler *et al.*, 2013: 9).

National surveys conducted in 1999 and 2007 found that the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings were the first and second most 'closely followed' news stories of those years respectively (*Pew Research Center* 1999, 2007). Extensive media coverage and public attention is an important factor to the selection because this widens the pool from which to select my news media sample. Mass media discourses dictate the knowledge the

public acquires about school shootings. Further, the way in which the problem is framed identifies the set of potential solutions available (Muschert, 2013; 267, 276). On the contrary, an event with very little media attention is unlikely to have much impact on policy-making, deemed the 'weak CNN effect'[17] by Robinson (2002: 38-39): "Given the bureaucratic and political constraints upon policy-makers, the publication of only a few news reports is unlikely to have a large effect on any policy process."

Lastly, these two incidents made the final selection because of their impact on policies relating to improving the safety of educational institutions and gun policies. First of all, a number of studies (Adding ton 2009; Birkland and Lawrence 2009; Fox and Savage 2009; Rasmussen and Johnson 2008) have noted a reimagining of security procedures in the aftermath of the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings. At first, this thesis had the intention of exploring school security policy responses like 'target-hardening' making it difficult for outsiders to gain entrance (locks on doors, metal detectors, etc.) and surveillance (addition of CCTV cameras); however, after reviewing existing literature referenced above, it proved difficult to find anything 'original' to add to the debate. Through my readings, analyses of policy documents (details on these will be provided) and attendance at a 'School Safety Symposium' (more on this momentarily), what became evident was the noticeable impact of the two shootings on emergency management and crisis communication. Markedly, there has not been extensive scholarly interest in the effect of school shootings on emergency management; in fact, Dumitriu (2013) calls this the 'forgotten factor' in school shooting research. For that reason, I switched my focus from the 'school security' policy responses to those related to emergency management plans and training, communication during school shootings, and post-crisis relations with the media.

When it comes to gun laws, a number of sources have noted a link between school shootings and gun availability (Harding *et al.* 2002; Kimmel and Mahler 2003; Vossekuil *et al.* 2004). Since guns are the most common weapons for multiple homicides (Levin and Madfis, 2009: 1243), they are an obvious target for policy action after spectacular and well-publicised attacks like school shootings. Arguably, Columbine and Virginia Tech, alongside the Stockton, California (1989) and Sandy Hook (2012) elementary school incidents[18], are the school shootings which have caused action and intense debate in the

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[17] The 'CNN effect' (Robinson 2002) is a theory which determines the amount of influence the media have on policy-makers when deciding whether to intervene in a global crisis, with a particular focus on US-led intervention and foreign policy; this model could possibly be adapted to allow for investigation of the news-media relationship in another context, i.e. school shootings in this case.

[18] The Stockton (1989) and Sandy Hook (2012) shootings were incidents involving external adult perpetrators, thus were not considered for case study selection as per the recommendations of Böckler *et al.*

public sphere about gun laws (see Spitzer 2012). Other scholars have begun to document perceptions within news media and political discourses that weak gun laws are to blame (Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001; Kleck 2009; Wondemaghen 2013). The spate of school shootings in the 1990s, culminating in the Columbine attack in 1999, has shifted the focus onto the issue of children and guns at schools[19]: this is paradoxical given that schools tend to be the safest places for children (Spitzer, 2012: 85). The Virginia Tech shooting was also a springboard for the 'concealed carry on campus' discussion about whether to allow students at colleges and universities to carry concealed firearms as a means of defending against potential school shooters (see, for example, Kopel 2009; Pratt 2013; Rasmussen and Johnson 2008; Rogers 2012; Wasserman 2011). Since research thus far has mainly been centred on the legal implications of this movement, I was in the position to offer a unique take on this by looking at *YouTube* commentary to gain some insight into what was motivating it.

1.3. *Contemporary Developments: A Post Sandy Hook Future*[20]

After the first stage of my interviews, the school shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school, Newtown, Connecticut occurred: this had notable consequences for the future of gun legislation. As it occurred so far on in my research process, the shooting is not being used as a case study (it also does not fit the definition I am appropriating since it was an outside attacker) but it is acknowledged throughout this thesis and its ramifications are discussed, particularly in gun data analysis chapters nine to eleven.

To provide some background context to the shooting, it happened on the 14th December 2012 and resulted in twenty-eight deaths. Based on death toll, it could be described as the second deadliest school shooting in U.S. history: twenty children aged five and six, and six female educators were killed during the shooting rampage; plus, the

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(2013) and Larkin (2009). The Stockton shooting led to the implementation of the assault weapons ban (1994-2004) and Sandy Hook reignited the debate about background checks and renewing the assault weapons ban — more will be said on this particular incident throughout the gun section. It is not a case study but is acknowledged as being important in shaping the post Columbine and Virginia Tech political landscape for gun reform.

[19] At the federal level, the legislative 'Gun Free Schools Act' (1990) restricts gun ownership at K-12 schools (elementary, middle and high schools) receiving federal funds and a number of state laws circumvent the 'private property' exception of that federal law (Kopel, 2009: 518-519). This law requires local educational agencies to expel any student who brings a gun to school for a minimum duration of one year (*U.S. Department of Education* 2013).

[20] I retrieved details for this case from reading news media sources and following the story closely.

mother of the gunman was murdered in her bed earlier that morning and the gunman who committed suicide after his attack. The Sandy Hook shooting has parallels with the 1996 school shooting incident in Dunblane, Scotland: similar ammunition (hollow point bullets) designed to inflict maximum damage; it involved an external attacker (adult male); the majority of victims were young children aged five and six.

Figure 5: Children being evacuated from Sandy Hook Elementary[21]

The day after the shooting, President Obama gave a very emotional press conference (see figure 6 on next page) and described it as the 'worst day of his presidency.' Earlier in 2012, a mass shooting had occurred at a late-night screening of 'The Dark Knight Rises' at a cinema in Aurora, Colorado, killing twelve people and wounding many others. This incident led to calls for changes to gun laws; however, the Obama administration did not take any action on this occasion (see Winkler 2012). After the Sandy Hook shooting, however, Obama appointed vice President, Joe Biden, alongside a team of administration members and outside experts, to put together gun reform proposals for the upcoming year of January 2013. Consequently, the resulting legislative package consisted of: universal background checks, bar 'common sense exceptions' such as family transfers and sales; renewing the assault weapons ban, limiting magazines to ten rounds, and banning the

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[21] This image was taken from: Angelova, Kamelia. (2012) 'Tragic Photos from the Sandy Hook Shooting Aftermath.' *Business Insider,* 14 December. *http://www.businessinsider.com/sandy-hook-elementary-shooting-newtown-connecticut-2012-12.*

possession of armour-piercing bullets; ending the ban on and making funding available for gun research, and appointing a director for the *Bureau for Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms* (*ATF*); enhancing law enforcement, including more training for first responders at sites of shootings; and improving school safety and mental health services (*USA Today*, 2013: News 6A). The implications of this proposal will be discussed in chapter ten.

Figure 6: Obama at press conference[22]

On the other hand, Sandy Hook is being used to push the particular issue of 'guns in schools.' In the aftermath of the shooting, the *National Rifle Association* (*NRA*) planned to develop reactive emergency response programs using its members to negate attacks in the style of air marshals on flights (Freking 2012). On the state-level, this proposal has been taken a step further with moves to allow teachers to carry guns in schools for protection. A remote town in Texas, Harrold, is now allowing this, with the justification being it is cheaper than having a security guard and the teachers have been extensively trained (Brown 2012). It is possible then that there could be a shift towards the thinking that it is acceptable and positive for some trusted staff members to be able to carry weapons at schools in case anything untoward happens. There is no chapter dedicated to this issue in this thesis, since it not something directly related to my case studies; but it will be

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[22] This image was retrieved from: Lemire, Jonathan. (2012) '"Our Hearts are broken today": President Obama fights off tears in Connecticut.' *Daily News (New York),* 14 December. *http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/obama-hearts-broken-today-article-1.1220714.*

acknowledged in the conclusion as something which may affect the way school shootings are managed in future.

2. Understanding Fear, Policy and School Shootings: An Overview of Existing Research

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a discussion of current literature and a critical appraisal of the theoretical context of this thesis. It is laid out in two sections outlining the main bodies of thought: the first section centres on moral panics, culture of fear, fear of crime, and risk management; the second discusses the framing of social problems and how these gain 'agenda status' to be considered for policy-making, as well as the key actors in the process. The linkage between the streams is to explore the conditions created by moral panics and a climate of fear under which social problems come to be considered for policy solutions. A gap in current literature is the development of policy — in particular, emergency management and gun policies, which have not really been addressed — through the moral panic stages of cultivation, operation and dissipation (Klocke and Muschert 2010).

2.1 Panic, Fear and Risk: Exploring the Literature

This section will set out the context for analysis of the emotional components of school shootings. First of all, I wish to discuss classical moral panic literature and the more recent conceptualisations of it. Of particular note is how the management of moral panics (Garland 2008) and the incorporation of new media forms (Hughes *et al.* 2011) have changed the way researchers approach the subject. Following that, I want to explore what 'fear' is and its entrenchment within a cultural system. A common component of this culture is the 'fear of crime' phenomenon where people feel particularly vulnerable and anxious about being victimised — this is the focus of the third sub-section. Finally, the inter-linkage of these feelings with risk management is discussed, with the managing of institutional reputations being of particular interest.

2.1.1 Moral Panic Theories

Rooted within social constructionism, moral panic literature clearly comes into play in the case of school shootings (see Cohen 1972/2002, 2011; Goode and Ben-Yeude 1994; Hall *et al.* 1978; Klocke and Muschert 2010; McRobbie 1994; McRobbie and Thornton 1995). These meet the criteria of being events where the level of threat has been *exaggerated* and deviance of youths *amplified* in order to obtain social regulation and consensus prompted a reaction.

Classic 'moral panic' literature (Cohen 1972/2002; Goode and Ben-Yeude 1994; Hall *et al.* 1978) provides a useful but limited starting point for exploring the phenomenon. Cohen's (1972) original framework is utilised in an attempt to ascertain to what extent the news media sample I have selected creates or reflects a moral panic. A detailed examination of this relationship between the media and moral panics is given by Cohen (1972/2002) divided up into three components: 1) exaggeration and distortion; 2) prediction; 3) symbolization. The first factor 'exaggeration and distortion' indicates the presence of melodrama (Cohen, 1972/2002: 20) and has been attributed to a disproportionate amount of fear[23] surrounding school shootings (Lawrence and Mueller 2003). Sensationalism in the media has also been attributed to other moral panics, such as the 'Jack the Ripper' murders (see Curtis 2001) and the 'Going Postal' shootings (see Ames 2007). The second factor of 'prediction' means news media reports imply that the event which occurred will happen again (Cohen, 2002: 26). With regards to school shootings, Killingbeck (2001: 186) draws a credible link between the 'normalisation' and prediction of school shootings with the fear that surrounds these incidents: "Rather than providing context, the media's labelling of these shootings as a 'trend' has tended to exacerbate people's fears about the safety of their children and youth in schools." The final element is 'symbolization' where a certain word and all its associated objects are symbolic of a particular status: the example given is of the word 'Mod' denoting certain types of hairstyles and clothing, ergo symbolising a deviant status in society (Cohen, 2002: 27). In the case of school shooters, the 'folk devil' concept seems to be associated with being a loner and an outcast in school (Cullen, 2009: 72; Killingbeck, 2001: 196).

Theorists Goode and Ben-Yeude (1994: 127, 135) juxtapose two moral panic paradigms: the 'grassroots model,' where the panic originates from genuine concern felt by

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[23] By this, I mean a certain feeling of apprehensiveness about an event and the possibility of it occurring. I will explore fear in more detail later on in this section.

the general public, which is then exacerbated by the media; whereas the 'elite-engineered model' attributes control to the elites in society instigating a threat in order to divert attention away from their own questionable activities. In a similar vein, Hall *et al.* (1978) theorised that moral panics occur to allow the media, who act as the 'secondary definers of social reality' (those representing reality through their portrayal of events) to promote and reproduce the dominant ideologies of the 'primary definers': those who occupy the most powerful positions in society. Consequently, because of the prevalent feeling that something must be 'done' about the issue at the crux of the moral panic (Burns and Crawford, 1999: 149), it does seem viable that some groups in society would exploit an issue in order to have certain ideologies promoted or rules enforced. It is likely that these arguments are likely to appear persuasive later on when the relationship between the media content and policy suggestions pertaining to guns is deliberated.

Recent moral panic literature has begun to explore added dimensions: the differences between representations and realities; the fragmentation of traditional media forms; the relationships between social agents engineering the moral panic (Hier, 2008: 174). To begin with, McRobbie and Thornton (1995) adopted the postmodernist stance that moral panic assessments should recognise that the media is intertwined within society through representations of social events and actors rather than being a separate entity. They noted that "social reality is experienced through language, communication and imagery" (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995: 570). What is important here is that the audience may be aware of the construction of social reality for them. Jewkes (2011) was particularly critical of Cohen's (1972) original assumption that audiences are not aware of their 'manipulation.' Accordingly, focus group research carried out by Petts *et al.* (2001) found that the lay public are 'media savvy.' This thesis will, therefore, follow McRobbie and Thornton (1995) by adopting the stance that media audiences have an *active role* in *interpreting* texts (for further information, see Habermas 1962/1989; Petts *et al.* 2001).

McRobbie and Thornton's (1995) piece, written before widespread access to the internet and the risk of social media, was ahead of its time in predicting the evolution of moral panics with the formation of new media forms. The production and consumption of news media has become increasingly blurred, with the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies and the growth of citizen journalism (Hughes *et al.*, 2011: 214). An example of this is the news reporting surrounding the Virginia Tech (2007) incident where students uploaded cell phone images of events transpiring around them and posted information onto websites; these sources were then used to construct news media stories about the shooting (see Gillmor 2007). New media technologies allow for 'alternative' — and perhaps

'controversial' — viewpoints to be aired and act as 'counter-narratives' to the existing moral panic (Klocke and Muschert 2010). It also facilitates the researcher in tracing the "pathways, conflicts, policy options and turning points in the construction of ideological panics" (Cohen, 2011: 239).

The *awareness* of the existence and processes of moral panics has now altered the way they can flourish (Klocke and Muschert 2010). The groups involved in the 'operation' stage of moral panic development are: interest groups, public officials, public and the media (Klocke and Muschert 2010; McRobbie and Thornton 1995). Markedly, Garland (2008) used the example of gun crime in England to demonstrate how politicians are able to *recognise* the development of a moral panic and hence manage it to suit their agendas. It was argued by Glassner (1999) that moral panics act as 'smokescreens' to distract people from other 'unmanageable' or 'inconvenient' fears. This would perhaps explain the 'failure to launch' thesis (Jenkins 2009) that some issues, such as child pornography, have failed to translate into moral panics despite having characteristics that should provoke media attention and political action.

An updated version of Cohen's (2011) model even acknowledged the potential for a 'moral panic' to have positive consequences, although he suggested describing it as an 'approved crusade' given the negative connotations of the term panic. On the contrary, Garland (2008: 24-25) argued that, in certain situations, it may be ethically taboo to apply this model: he used the example of 9/11, for it fits the criteria outlined by Goode and Ben-Yeuda (1994), but it may possibly be seen as insensitive to call that horrific event a 'moral panic.' A similar argument could be applied to school shootings because labelling something as a moral panic classifies an objectively traumatic event as something hysterical or exaggerated. I think, however, sociologists should not shy away from horrifying events, as these are the ones which need researched, to try and prevent them in future. This is perhaps even more of a reason to determine whether the reactions were made in the climate of hyperbole and overreaction, as this can affect solutions meant to reduce future incidents; herein is the basis for linking the two streams of theory in this thesis.

2.1.2 The State of Being Afraid

Contemporary scholars have begun to probe the nature of 'fear' itself (see, for example, Altheide 2002a, 2002b, 2009; Bauman 2006; Furedi 2007; Gardner 2008; Glassner 2004; Schneier 2006; Tudor 2003). When it comes to gaps in current knowledge about fear, this is still to be developed in relation to *contemporary* experiences of fear (Furedi, 2007: 1). A trend as recent as school shootings — which really began to be treated as a distinct social problem in the U.S. from the 1990s onwards (Newman *et al.*, 2004: 51) — certainly fits the criterion and warrants further exploration.

The 'culture of fear' literature complements and may be adapted to moral panic literature. This phenomenon is said to be present in Western society, particularly the U.S. (Glassner 2004). Bauman (2006) and Gardner (2008) claimed that a climate of fear in the U.S. is rather paradoxical, given its wealth and the longevity of its population in comparison to other parts of the world. A 'new' kind of fear exists post 9/11 which is now directed at an 'unknown enemy,' making it all the more un-manageable (Critcher, 2011: 269). Exploring a culture of fear from a sociological perspective allows for further examination of how particular concepts relating to fear arise from the social responses to school shootings. Further, it could be argued that the grandiose and reactionary nature of the 'culture of fear' means that it tends to be counterproductive to what it sets out to achieve — the results of my research will hopefully demonstrate this — and can lead to unnecessary constraints upon people (in Warr, 2000: 46).

The particular 'culture of fear' to which I am referring is a sentiment affecting people closest to the *possibility* of a school shooting: parents, students, and staff. As I am basing interpretations on narratives, I cannot infer how many people the climate of fear affects and to what extent. What I do intend to do, rather, is to assess the language of news media content creating the conditions for such a climate to develop; thereafter, letters to the editor and *YouTube* comments offer a 'snapshot' — they are not a comprehensive representation given their limited space and people's selectiveness of what they choose to write — into people's perceptions both at the time of the incidents and in contemporary society. The main theorists I draw on to elaborate the 'culture of fear' are Altheide, Bauman, Furedi and Glassner (see Critcher 2011). Each of them brings something distinct to fear literature and inform my analyses. The most convincing to me in my own analyses of a certain period in time are the theories of Altheide and Glassner, which use empirical data to support their arguments and offer valuable insights on the linkages between news media and its production of a culture of fear in the U.S.

An aspect of this climate is a particular fear of becoming a crime victim (see Garland 2001; Lee 2007; Warr 2000). The vague nature of the term 'fear of crime' was highlighted

by Williams *et al.* (2000) questioning what it actually entailed. Lee (2007: 124) maintained that the term is so loaded with meaning that it can never be understood universally or objectively. A definition of the phenomenon is provided by Farrall *et al.* (2009: 78-79) as a lived experience based on a perception that the risk of victimisation of crime is high and that extra precautions should be taken to negate this. The foundation for this phenomenon in the U.S. has its roots in a period of social unrest after J.F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963 and subsequent race riots (Stanko, 2000: 14).

More recent studies (Gabriel and Greve 2003; Jackson 2004, 2009; Jackson and Gray 2010) have drawn a link between emotionality and fear of crime. It has been said that emotions prepare individuals for their reaction to events occurring in their environment (Scherer *et al.*, 2004: 519). Clearly, 'fear' is something which will be experienced differently for each individual so it is perhaps better to think of 'fear' as representing a 'continuum of feelings' rather than a singular emotional state (Farrall *et al.*, 2009: 79). Jackson (2004: 951) theorised that one's 'fear of crime' is predicated on perceptions of 'risk' and 'vulnerability' within their physical and social environments. In a similar vein, Farrell *et al.* (2009: 157) claimed that people 'read' the environment around them to assess the risk of crime. To clarify, certain situations such as walking through a dimly lit park could trigger a state of 'being afraid' but this would only be for the duration of the walk; therefore, 'fear of crime' can be situational and pass quickly in certain contexts (Gabriel and Greve, 2003: 601).

The state of being afraid tends to become a 'social problem' (Jackson 2009) when anxiety about the risk of victimisation impacts people's lives immensely; this is known as 'dysfunctional worry' (Jackson and Gray 2010). Notably, when people feel 'vulnerable,' levels of threat and risk are distorted (Sacco and Glockman 1987; Jackson 2004). The notion of being able to *control* the crime, should it transpire, is of key importance here. Hale (1996: 5) argued that "people who feel unable to protect themselves [for a variety of reasons]…might be expected to 'fear' crime more than others." A study conducted by Jackson (2009) found that high levels of worry correlated with people's chances of victimisation (whether their social group is likely to be affected), and their perceived levels of control over the event and its consequences. In the case of school shootings, it could be inferred that students in higher education institutes would develop a state of fear based on: 'relative risk' (the high chance of their social group being affected); vulnerability existing in a lack of control over what transpires (without any form of defending themselves); the consequences of which would be severe (likely to be serious injuries or death). These

feelings are likely contributing to the 'concealed carry on campus' movement to be discussed in chapter nine.

On the other hand, Jackson and Gray's (2010) paper, using a London-based crime survey, found that 'fear of crime' could be constructive in cases where people took precautions that in turn made them feel safer (and presumably more in control). Pre-emptive behaviour such as carrying pepper spray to defend against a potential attacker is an overt and intentional reaction to the 'fear of crime' (Gabriel and Greve, 2003: 603). This translates into a more routine and practical reaction that could possibly negate the initial state of fear (Jackson and Gray, 2010: 5). Such findings are once again notable to discussions in chapter nine about 'concealed carry' as a strategy utilised by carriers to deal with the possibility of a school shooting occurring.

2.1.3 Crisis and Risk Management

The conceptualisations of crisis management after the two case studies were affected by feelings of fear and anxiety. The *perceived* level of a potential threat is usually disproportionate to the *actual* statistical probability (Sunstein, 2005: 69), which tends to occur when an event triggers emotional reactions. Events have certain 'risk signatures' attached to them, inscribing levels of concern and the possibility of ill effects (Petts *et al.* 2001: 92). Something as shocking and horrifying as a school shooting is likely to have a very negative one.

The concept of 'risk' has become a business in itself, generating provisions like 'risk analysis,' 'risk management' and 'risk communication' (Furedi 1997). Risk management attempts to predict what may happen and figure out the best solutions (mitigation) to minimise harms (Garland, 1997: 182). After all, it has been said that "the best way to manage a crisis is to prevent one" (Coombs, 2012: 31). Furedi (2008, 2009) notes the tendency of a risk management paradigm to focus on formulating solutions based on surmising about 'worst case scenarios.' In terms of school shootings, the 'crisis management' of planning and managing of violence (Pagliocca and Nickerson, 2001: 385) should be located within the wider rubric of more commonplace school violence, as well as accounting for potential spectacular events which are rarer but more likely to be lethal in nature. What are known as 'emergency management plans' then seek to reduce the risk of an event turning into a crisis (Heath *et al.*, 2009: 125).

Likewise, Power (2004) notes that risk management paradigms have become prevalent and conspicuous as a governing logic. Though his examples are U.K.-centric, the fundamental principles of his claim may also apply to another security conscious nation like the U.S. The main thesis advanced is that risk management now intertwines with national security and safety concerns. Power (2004) also noted that not all incidents become crises, as institutions 'select' the risks to manage — this echoes discussions about issues which have 'failed to launch' into moral panics (see Jenkins 2009).

One of the most interesting aspects of the Power (2004) article is the idea that risk management is increasingly becoming about managing reputational or secondary risks alongside primary ones. It has been said that feelings of anger, injustice and outrage motivate the need to attribute responsibility and causation to a specific individual or institution (Montada, 1993: 83, 85). What I intend to explore are attributions of blame and accountability addressed to authorities after Columbine and Virginia Tech and how these accusations flowing from the external threat of violence were rearticulated into a 'secondary risk management' of protecting the institution's reputation after crises (Beniot 1997; Borghesi and Gaudenzi 2013; Heath *et al.* 2009; Power 2004).

2.2 Defining Social Problems and Formulating Policy

With the first section setting up the conditions allowing issues to be defined as social problems, this one will explore the 'legacy' of moral panics i.e. their long-lasting effects (Klocke and Muschert 2010). This will be achieved by examining how social problems gain status on the policy agenda and develop into implemented laws. This is something which has not been fully addressed in existing moral panic and culture of fear literature, particularly in relation to the two policy areas I am focusing on: emergency management and guns. I will start by examining the key role of 'focusing events' in allowing social problems get on the policy agenda. The following two sub-sections will then show how policy and media framing has been utilised to symbolically portray gun laws and school shootings in certain ways. To thereafter discuss the key actors in the policy-making process, the triangular relationship model of the public, news media and politicians developed by Burns and Crawford (1999) — albeit with caution given its limitations — will be discussed in relation to each of its components: the role of the news media in policy

debates and relations with the public; the influence of political actors on citizens; the link between news media and political actors.

2.2.1 Gaining Agenda Status

Framing a condition in a certain way can define it as a 'social problem' (Best 1995). Issues compete for attention within the public arena and therefore must compete to gain and maintain status as a 'social problem' (Best 1995; Entman 2007; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Wondemaghen 2013). Competition occurs because of the 'limited carrying capacity' of the structural arenas in society affecting the political and social agenda of each problem: the government, news and entertainment media, research bodies, private businesses, and religious institutions (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 58-59. Kingdon (1994) claimed that gaining 'agenda status' transforms issues into social problems receiving attention from political officials. A distinction can be made between the 'government agenda' of items currently getting attention and 'decision agenda' of topics up for discussion, consisting of *alternative* options (Kingdon 1994/2003: 4). Gaining 'agenda status' involves the conflation of three metaphorical streams: the political stream, referring to the wider political climate at that point in time; the policy stream, consisting of prescriptive recommendations to solve the issue; the problem stream, based upon the dimensions of the issue and how it is being perceived in public consciousness (Kingdon 1994).

When it comes to the issue of gun violence, it tends to be 'focusing events' which give it prominence, triggering media attention and expanding the issues to be discussed (Birkland 1997; Kingdon, 1994/2003). Likewise, Garland (2001: 111-112) maintains that political initiatives tend to be triggered by atypical and shocking events. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: 3, 16) made the point that during 'crises' — focusing events, as per the definitions of Birkland (1997) and Kingdon (1994/2003) — immediate strategies have to be formed and prevailing narratives then have a direct impact on which coping strategies are selected. Although mass shootings are relatively rare in the overall spectrum of gun violence, they tend to act as a prism through which to discuss ways to solve this issue. Once an issue enters an arena like the media, it tends to escalate into other ones, such as research bodies and government. The selection and maintenance of a condition as a 'social problem' in the public arena requires urgency and drama, which have to be constantly reshaped as other issues compete for attention (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 61, 67). In the

case of school shootings, there are too many possible 'causal explanations' influencing school shootings and too few incidents to determine a significant variable as the direct cause (Harding *et al.* 2002). It has been discovered that the news media tended to focus on violent media and guns, which can then snowball into research and governmental agendas as potential policy avenues to be explored (Birkland and Laurence 2009; Lawrence and Birkland 2004).

2.2.2 Framing the Policy Debate

The first line of inquiry, therefore, is to combine policy analysis literature with studies on framing which identifies "some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements" (Entman, 1993: 55) can set the parameters for policy-making. Similar to media framing, policy framing allows for a more focused approach to solving an issue by highlighting certain aspects of it and then formulating solutions to them (Birkland and Lawrence 2009; Fischer 2003). A social constructionist interpretation recognises that social actors are actively engaged in the process of framing (Fischer, 2003: 85). Key actors in the policy-making process, such as elected officials, interest groups, the media and political parties, use framing to "define political space and erect the boundaries within which a public policy issue will be considered" (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005: xii).

Within public discourses, school shootings are commonly dually framed through an implied 'problem-solution' package: this tends to be quite narrow and rudimentary in its focus (Muschert, 2013: 276-277). This parallels Altheide's (1997) problem frame components where the 'solution' and 'processes' and 'agents' to achieve the resolution to a constructed 'problem' are promoted. For instance, Altheide (2009) argued news coverage of the Columbine shooting was framed as a matter of national security, hence giving it ready-made 'solutions.' It could be said that political parties took on the role of 'moral entrepreneurs' (Becker 1963) by informing the public and attempting to influence legislation surrounding the issue of school shootings.

Research by Lindgren (2011) found that, immediately after a school shooting, Google searches for both 'Marilyn Manson' — a musician frequently cited as a causal factor of such incidents — and 'gun control' increased until about five or six days after the incident. Considering this, it could be argued that school shootings are being constructed as problems relating to regulating guns and 'dangerous' music rather than wider social and

cultural factors (Lindgren, 2011: 123, 127). Likewise, Haider-Markel and Joslyn's (2001) study found that, following school shootings, Democrats tended to blame lax gun laws as a causal factor in school shootings and were more likely to support changes in gun legislation; whilst Republicans claimed violence in the media was to blame (Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001).

What will be explored in this thesis are the alternative ways to frame the gun policy currently in use. As a political tool, framing can shape the way citizens think about an issue by evoking certain values: for instance, abortion can be framed as 'women's rights' to gain support or, conversely, as 'partial-birth' to portray it negatively (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005: 13). Various 'sides' in a debate, such as gun policy, can attempt to influence the framing of problems to guide policy alternatives (Stone, 1989: 283). The construction and promotion of frames are constrained to a certain extent by a number of factors: institutional beliefs and practices, functioning as the 'practical' counterpart of ideologies; as well as the status, credibility and resources of actors (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005: 7-8, van Dijk, 1998a: 172, 186). To be particularly effective in doing this, framers should assess the 'public mood' at that moment in time and frame accordingly (Gabrielson, 2005: 79).

In their study, Schnell and Callaghan (2005: 124) highlighted the suitability of gun policy for framing analysis, given its shifting paradigmatic representations intended to persuade the public. 'Focussing events' — in this case, the two school shooting case studies — tend to provoke an expansion of frames, particularly to members of the public (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005: 10). For instance, Schnell and Callaghan (2005) conducted content analysis on thirty-seven *Brady* and eleven *NRA* press releases published six months after 9/11. The findings showed that 38% of *Brady*'s press releases linked gun control to terrorism, particularly how the gun show loophole allows terrorists to buy guns; whilst the *NRA* reiterated the right to bear arms, emphasising its importance to "our national defence." Even more tellingly, six months prior to 9/11 the news media were found to be focussed instead on violence and schools, demonstrating how events can be used to shape an issue (Schnell and Callaghan, 2005: 128-130).

One of the ways framing shapes perceptions is through 'priming': making certain aspects of a perceived reality salient (Entman 1993, 2007). When it comes to gun policy one way to deal with this is 'crime control' — predicated on assumptions that criminals and crime are controllable via gun regulatory laws — drawing upon the conflation of low crime rates with gun restrictions (Vizzard, 1999: 138). In the U.S., 'crime control'

arguments have been less convincing and policy responses would tend to revolve around punishing deviant, criminalised individuals (Squires, 2000: 7-8). Another neutral way to address gun violence has been via 'public health' framing, started in 1983 by the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (Spitzer, 2012: 49). What this does is treat gun violence like any other harmful substance or activity like alcohol usage and smoking, hence producing safety responses like child-safety locks on guns (Davidson, 1998: 281; Vizzard, 1999: 139). Davidson (1998: 281) made the point that it is a first albeit limited step towards addressing the problem of gun violence. Conversely, criticism directed at 'public health' framing argued it is based on a notion of 'risky behaviour' and ignores the roots of the problem (Kohn, 2004: 134).

2.2.3 Media Framing

The influence exerted through the media comes from the selection of stories based on what is newsworthy and framing (Wondemaghen, 2013: 7). Firstly, the news media has to decide which issues to cover. Since it is simply not possible for news media organisations to faithfully 'reproduce the real world' by covering every possible story in comprehensive detail, events are selected to be covered based on notions of 'newsworthiness' (Cohen and Young 1973): these are shaped by the internal guidelines within a news media organisation and its journalists' own opinions, as well as ideological biases present throughout the wider media system (Cohen 2002). It is believed that, in order to attract an audience, "news must be immediate, dramatic or novel" (Berrington and Jemphrey, 2003: 227). Accordingly, news stories covering negative events — particularly ones involving crime — appear quite frequently in the media because they tend to be: continuous (stories can appear on a number of occasions); unambiguous (there is no dispute over the event's negativity); consonant (can be connected to previous stories); unexpected (the occurrence of these events tends to be less predictable) (Galtung and Ruge, 1965: 68).

News stories involving crime are probably the most applicable to be sensationalised by emphasising the commonality of the crime involved, such as constantly describing it as 'another one,' and dramatised through the usage of striking visual images like a bloody corpse, which gives the public a visual representation of what it is like to be a victim of crime (Altheide, 2002b: 43, 135; Chermak, 1995: 93). Altheide (2002b: 43), albeit

exaggeratingly, summarises this trend: "Publishers and editors love drama, evil and suffering. They disapprove of its occurrence while celebrating its aftermath."

It could be stated that school shootings are 'newsworthy' events because they are violent, relatively unusual, dramatic, sensational, consonant, and last for a longer duration of news cycle (with the coverage of funerals and possible investigations and lawsuits resulting from them) (Maguire *et al.*, 2002: 466). In the mid-1990s, school shootings were still considered to be relatively rare crimes in the United States; following the Columbine incident, however, the media described the event as 'an all-too-familiar story' that could now happen anywhere (Cohen, 2002: xii). This story was meaningful to its audience probably due to the fact that it was an event which occurred in the United States and was part of an on-going social trend, making it 'culturally proximate,' familiar to some degree, and an on-going social issue (see Galtung and Ruge 1965 for further information on newsworthiness).

'Media framing' acts as a mechanism to portray events in a certain way within the news media (Muschert, 2009: 3). This is achieved through a process of "selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration" (Tankard, 2001: 101). Studies by Chyi and McCombs (2004) and Muschert (2007, 2009) have looked at the media framing of school shootings. Chyi and McCombs (2004) selected a sample of one hundred and seventy Columbine-related news items from the *New York Times*, printed up to a month after the shooting. Content analysis discovered that the *New York Times* increased the salience of the story by mixing media coverage frames around to keep the story novel. Likewise, a study by Muschert (2009) examined the media frames in six hundred and eighty-three print and broadcast news items covering the Columbine incident. It was discovered the most conspicuous theme, present in 72.1% of items, were reactions to the shooting, mainly possible causal explanations for it; whereas actual coverage of the actors, actions and consequences of Columbine only accounted for 40.2% of examples. It was, therefore, suggested that the media frame was reshaped into an analysis of the shooting and similar crimes to increase the salience of the news story (Muschert, 2009: 9-10); it could be said that this idea parallels Chyi and McCombs's (2004) study about the agenda-setting model and object salience.

There is no denying that media framing influences the wider political and public debate, but the paths and impact of this influence remain to be revealed fully. The outcomes of the gun-control debate following major shooting events like those at Columbine and Virginia Tech tend to be anticlimactic in terms of policy implementation, given the policy debates which precede them(Birkland and Lawrence, 2009: 1410; 1423). Whilst ambiguity and political pressures partly explain the lack of direct lineage between policy changes and media coverage, broad claims made by politicians about potential policies that were not actually achievable due to existing law and policy options was also a contributing factor (Birkland and Lawrence, 2009: 1420).

The use of 'thematic' and 'episodic' frames in television news stories was explored in Iyengar's (1991) study. 'Thematic frames' are those which put problems into the broader social and political context. Iynegar (1991) found that use of thematic framing in news stories led audiences to hold political leaders responsible and increased support for governmental programs presented as a means to solve the problem. By contrast, 'episodic framing' focuses more on the specific context of a story and the emotional impact upon those affected. Iyengar (1991) found that episodic framing was prolific in political news coverage meaning many social problems were overlooked because of the lack of contextual background given to them and resulted in the audience holding individuals responsible for social problems. Important to note, however, is the fact that new stories were not solely 'episodic' or 'thematic' and so classifications were based on the predominant frame (Iyengar, 1991: 15-16) — this weakens Iyengar's (1991) approach, as it neglects the possible impact of the presence of the other frames in negating the predominant one.

The findings of Iyengar (1991) around thematic and episodic framing were taken further in research by Gross (2008). An experimental study was set up where participants had to read two different versions of a column arguing against mandatory minimum sentences for crimes framed 'episodically' or 'thematically.' The findings were that 'thematic framing' was overall more convincing but that 'episodic framing' was even more persuasive under specific circumstances. It was discovered that the persuasiveness of 'episodic framing' depended on its ability to elicit specific emotions like sympathy and pity and increase opposition to minimum sentencing. It was argued, however, that the effects of this intense emotional reaction would likely be only short-term in nature (Gross, 2008: 184).

These results were further developed by Aarøe (2011) in order to fill a gap in the literature about the strength of the different frame types. Central to the study was the

'persuasiveness hypothesis,' where 'episodic frames' are more convincing and gain more support for policy change in cases when they elicit pity, compassion, anger and disgust. Conversely, it was theorised that the lack of characters in 'thematic frames' for the audience to direct emotions at weakens the strength of the frame to convince audiences. To test those theories, participant experiments were carried out using the example of the immigration-limiting measure the '24-rule' in Denmark: this requires that a citizen who marries a non-citizen cannot live in the country until both parties are aged twenty-four. Stories relating to this issue were framed both episodically and thematically and participants were asked to rate the strength of arguments presented. Findings of the research support the 'persuasiveness hypothesis' that readers' emotional reactions to episodic framing translates into more support for the policy position promoted by the frame. The only contradiction to this is 'thematic frames' with extreme statistical distributions, which can have a 'shock effect' and hence be convincing (Aarøe, 2011: 221). A limitation of this study, noted by Aarøe (2011: 221-222) is that it fails to consider the impact of other emotions like shame and sadness on persuasiveness.

I utilised these framing theories to decipher how school shootings are portrayed in the news media and whether this could create the conditions for a climate of fear to develop; the results of this are discussed in chapter five. Framing literature is also drawn upon in chapter eleven, documenting the alternative strategies suggested by gun-related interviewees to mobilise public support for the issue of gun violence; the theories of Iyengar (1991), Gross (2008), and Aarøe (2011) became particularly relevant in these discussions.

2.2.4 Policy-Making Model: Key Actors in the Process

Using the example of news and policy debates after school shootings, theorists Burns and Crawford (1999) devised a model of a triangular and symbiotic relationship existing between three pertinent groups in the policy-making process: the media cover a school shooting story to attract customers; the fearful media-consuming public feel that preventative action has to be taken against future incidents; politicians intervene through legislative action to quash the public's fears, which the media then cover. Although this model certainly has credibility, considering the influence of each of the groups (to be discussed momentarily), it is perhaps more viable to pursue an understanding of the

media/public and public/politicians relationship as one which does have a power imbalance: the media and politicians have the ability to control which information is released; whilst the public are able to debate what is presented to them in the media as per the 'active audience' theory (Jewkes 2011; McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Petts *et al.* 2001) and engage with the process of governance, particularly with growth of the internet facilitating democratic participation (Papacharissi 2009). Another limitation of the model is that it excludes academics from the process, whose research can inform issues already on the policy-making agenda (Kingdon, 1994/2003: 53, 55).

To begin with, Burns and Crawford (1999: 160) maintained that "the conceptualization and depiction of a social problem [in the news media] largely influences public perception of the problematic issue." The theoretical 'agenda-setting' model argues that the media are able to affect the opinions of policy-makers as well as obliquely influence public opinion; the media further acts as a location for the promotion of subsequent policy decisions (Lawrence and Birkland, 2004: 1195). In this sense, once an issue is given coverage by one arena of public discourse — in this case the media — this then snowballs into public and governmental arenas (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 67). Similarly, Kingdon (1994/2003: 59-60) pointed to the media's ability to magnify the impact of on-going movements around issues. Theorists like Altheide (1985) and Best (1995) make similar arguments about the media's ability to 'transform' claims: the public's perception of an issue comes through the media's reiteration of what was said by the primary claim-makers who use the media as an initial springboard to draw public and political attention to an issue.

My approach to reading audiences is in line with Castells (2009: 127) who is also critical of theorists positioning media audiences as rendered helpless by the corporate media, for this is adopting "the mind setting of the media industries…who need to define their would-be consumers as passive targets for their messages in order to program content assumed to sell in the marketplace." This is, therefore, locating audience analysis within a consumer paradigm. The helpless media audience theory is counteracted by the argument that the media audience "modify the signified of the messages they receive by interpreting them according to their own cultural frames" (Castells, 2009: 127). In his 'Encoding/Decoding' essay, Hall (1980) maintained that readings from a text can be separated on the basis of 'denotation' and 'connotation': denotative 'literal' meanings tend to be inflexible universally shared readings; whereas connotative sub-textual meanings are

more flexible, as they are determined by readers' interpretations. The 'hegemonic' meaning of texts can be 'read' in a number of ways: 'dominant,' where the message is decoded in the same way it was encoded; 'negotiated,' where some elements of the encoded message may be decoded; 'oppositional,' where an alternative decoding is reached to the initial encoding. A number of other theorists (Habermas 1962/1989; Petts *et al.* 2001) have assumed that media audiences play an active role in interpreting media texts.

Particularly salient is the symbiotic relationship between the media and politicians: the media provides a guide of topics needing to be addressed and thereafter showcases any congressional action taken on it; politicians, on the other hand, are able to legitimise the content of the media by using it as a forum for their policy suggestions and implementations (Burns and Crawford, 1999: 156-157, 161). Similarly, Rochefort and Cobb (1994, 9) noted the media's role in presenting a selection of policy alternatives: "If policy-making is a struggle over alternative realities, media reflects, advances and interprets these alternatives." In this context, the media is "…the funnel regulating the flow of communication between the policymakers and others in the political system who might seek any different policy" (Spitzer, 1993: 9). Castells (2009: 194) was particularly convinced about the media's role in policy-making: "They are the space of power-making…where power relationships are decided between competing political and social actors." Delli-Carpini (2005: 22-23) makes a similar point that media sources are the *places* of political debate as well as the *providers*. This is even more of a convincing point when considering the internet's provision of open and accessible sites to debate issues of political concern (Papacharissi 2002).

During the course of his research for *Agendas*, however, Kingdon (1994) actually found that the media had a lower impact on policy than anticipated. Kingdon (1994/2003: 58-59) theorised that the tendency to cover newsworthy stories meant that coverage was saturated but only for a short term, hence 'diluting' its impact upon policy agendas. Media coverage of problems may then need to be saturated to pressure the government into debating a certain issue (see Lawrence and Birkland 2004). What Lawrence and Birkland (2004) concluded from their content analyses of both news media coverage and Congressional action following Columbine was the governmental and media arenas offer different definitions of event-driven problems, where the latter can be motivated to cover novel frames, such as popular culture, that will appeal to audiences or those that are promoted by politicians with their own agendas (such as increasing constituency support); whilst saturated media coverage may pressure the government into debating a certain issue.

Moreover, given the power differences between the media, a forum of discourse only, and Congress, an arena of policy debate and action, the issues debated in the media may not necessarily be translated into policy (Lawrence and Birkland, 2004: 1195, 1200).

Further to this, a policy-media interactive model called the 'CNN Effect' — based on the role of the broadcast station *CNN* of pushing US foreign policy with regards to 'humanitarian interventions' such as those in Kosovo and Bosnia — was devised by Robinson (2002) to identify instances of media coverage encouraging a particular course of policy action. The tone and framing of media coverage, coupled with uncertainty about appropriate policy action at the level of decision-makers, hence contributes to the course of policy action taken. Of key importance here is establishing a relationship between the media and policy in which news coverage is a *significant factor* in influencing the decisions of policy-makers (Robinson, 2002: 37; emphasis added).Robinson (2002: 41) thus makes the following charge:

> "If we observe substantial amounts of empathy-framed
> media coverage containing implicit or explicit criticism of
> government in action, combined with policy uncertainty
> within the executive, we expect media coverage to have been
> a factor in producing the policy outcome."

The politician-public relationship is also said to be symbiotic in nature: the public provide an indication of the issues to be addressed through opinion polls, activism and so forth; whilst the politicians provide the public with details of how they will address this problem (Burns and Crawford, 1999: 160). It was argued by Stone (1989: 282) that, to gain citizens' support for a particular issue, political actors utilise 'causal stories' that "describe harms and difficulties, attribute them to actions of other individuals or organizations and thereby claim the right to invoke government power to stop the harm." Gabrielson (2005: 83) surmised that citizens who are politically sophisticated and ideological are more likely to have stronger predispositions and be able to resist pre-packaged messages; conversely, the *less ideological but attentive* citizens are those who are more susceptible to such influences.

3. Research Sample

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the process of selecting datasets and conducting research. It has been prescribed that, during the course of research, the various strata of the sample should be fully explained and justified for its representativeness (Holsti 1969: 17-18). The datasets used explicate opinions expressed by the most important groups contributing to the debate, a practice recommended by Klocke and Muschert (2010: 14): news media sources, letters to the editor, *YouTube* comments, and policy documents; as well as interviewing a number of relevant persons. I will go through each of my data sources explaining the sample selection.

Firstly, why certain print news media sources[24] (see appendix A for details of these) were chosen will be justified. The processes of selecting a potential sample from various time periods and the actual articles to be coded will thereafter be outlined. The focus will turn to explaining the media-related sample of feature articles, letters and *YouTube* comments chosen. Lastly, the policy-related dimensions of the research will be summarised: choosing official policy documents, attending a school safety symposium; justifying the selection of interviewees (see appendix B for an overview of these): presidents or communication directors from gun-related interest groups, a political pollster who worked with the Virginia Governor at the time of the Virginia Tech shooting, an expert who has written two landmark pieces of gun legislation and co-founded a think tank, a director of emergency management and a spokesperson from a mobile phone 'safety app.'

3.1 News Media Sample

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[24] I originally intended to include leading broadcast stations of ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox and NBC in my sample, the transcripts of which were available on *Nexis*. Once I had my print news media sample in place, I realised that I had to limit the variables to make the project manageable. For that reason, I settled for print news media and thought it more prudent to focus my attention on the opinion sources of letters to the editor and *YouTube* as the public reactions to the shootings(more on these later in this chapter).

3.1.1 Selecting News Media Sources

News media was the first narrative form examined to decipher the power language exerts in the social construction of reality (Fowler, 1991: 8). Guiding my thoughts are the findings of other theorists (Brooks *et al.* 2000; Burns and Crawford 1999; Fox and Savage 2009; Killingbeck 2001) that the news media has distorted the risk of school shootings. In order to get the most detailed overview of discourses relating to the shooting, print news media definitely had to be included in my sample, for it produces more data than other media formats such as broadcast news (Groseclose and Milyo, 2005: 1204). The sheer volume of news media coverage available in U.S. print news on my two case studies was enormous, so I had to make a lot of decisions about sampling. Using a purposive, stratified sampling strategy of selecting sources deemed important and organised by different variables (Holsti, 1969: 130), print news[25] organisations were chosen based upon:

-High levels of readership. Sources in the top ten circulation list: *The New York Times, USA Today, Daily News* (*New York*), *New York Post*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Denver Post* respectively[26]; the two most popular newsweeklies *TIME* and *Newsweek* (*Alliance for Audited Media* 2012; see *The Huffington Post* 2013 for the most recent figures).[27]
-Local newspapers in the states where the incidents occurred: *Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News* for Colorado; *Richmond Times Dispatch* and *Roanoke Times* for Virginia;
-Presence in previous research studies like Chyi and McCombs (2004), Kupchik and Bracy (2009), Muschert (2007, 2009): *New York Times* and *USA Today*.

Accessibility was also important: for instance, the newspaper with the highest circulation figures, *Wall Street Journal*, required a subscription to the magazine to read online content. As a result, I was limited to the news sources available on the computer database *Nexis* or available to access online without a subscription (*Newsweek* and *Rocky Mountain News*).

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[25] Please refer to appendix B for an overview of each news source.
[26] The sources missing from this top 10 list (*Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago Tribune*) are ones which are not available on *Nexis.*
[27] For the most recent figures, I referred to *The Huffington Post* (2013) source. At the time of selecting the sample I referenced *Alliance for Audited Media* (2012) and these listings have remained relatively stable from 2012-2013.

The only exception to this was *TIME* magazine: I have already subscribed to this for years and thus was able to access its online archives.

My print news media sample overall examined articles from the following local and national newspapers and 'newsweeklies' (news magazines): *Daily News, Denver Post, New York Post, New York Times, Newsweek, Richmond Times Dispatch, Roanoke Times, Rocky Mountain News, TIME, USA Today,* and *The Washington Post*. As this is only a sample, however, it can only be seen as *representative* of a body of potential media content (Holsti, 1969: 128).

3.1.2 Selecting Articles for Coding

Once I had chosen my news media sources, I then moved to the second stage of selecting the relevant articles from *Nexis* using a similar process to Kupchik and Bracy (2009). The first step was ascertaining the terms to type into the search function that would bring the optimum number of *relevant* results. An example of irrelevancy was just tying 'Columbine' into the search function, which brought back articles on gardening (relating to the flower) and sport (containing teams with that name). An alternative was to type 'Columbine' and the surnames of the perpetrators 'Harris' and 'Klebold' into the search function; however, I inferred not all stories would mention the shooters[28], so I terminated this idea too. The final option I tried was using 'Columbine' and 'shooting' as the search criteria, filtered to 'U.S. news sources,' and this brought back the most relevant results to the school shooting incident.

The actual stage of retrieving results for the Columbine sample was rather laborious. The plan was to locate articles for a five year period after Columbine (1999-2004) and the ten year anniversary (2009). As it transpired, searching for articles for 1999-2004 brought back the result 'too many results to retrieve' meaning *Nexis* limited the total amount to one thousand articles[29], which could possibly distort the sample. A way to negate this was to break down the time period into multiple searches: the day of the shooting and the day

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[28] From a documentary I had seen (Moritz 2000), I knew some families of victims had requested that the perpetrators not be named, especially for the one year anniversary of the shooting. It was inferred that some news media outlets would comply with this and thus including the names of the shooters could skew the sample by excluding those sources.

[29] If a search brings back more than three thousand results, *Nexis* limits the total amount of articles to one thousand. It is not known how *Nexis* selects those articles, however, so it is likely to be a distorted representation of the actual pattern of news media coverage at that time.

after (20th-21st April 1999), which I figured would bring a high number of articles; the week after the shooting (22nd-27th April 1999); the month after Columbine split in two (28thApril-5th May 1999 and 6th-19th May1999); up to one year after the shooting (20th May1999-20thApril2000); every year up to five years after the shooting (21stApr 2000-19th Apr 2004); the days surrounding the ten year anniversary of Columbine (19th-21st April 2009). As mentioned, this was a laborious process, but allowed me to retrieve the optimum number of results in *Nexis.*

The only exceptions to this were *Newsweek, TIME* and *Rocky Mountain News*, which are not in the *Nexis* database. What I did, therefore, was go to the website archives of each of those sources and typed 'Columbine' and 'shooting' into the search function. From the *Rocky Mountain News* results, I downloaded all articles from 20th April 1999-20th April 2004 — I could not retrieve results for the ten year anniversary as *RMN* went defunct in 2007 — and included all these in the potential sample. In the case of *Newsweek* and *TIME*, I searched for a five year time period (20th April 1999-20th April 2004) and the ten year anniversary (19th-21st April 2009). Once I had all the *Newsweek* and *TIME* results, I divided these up by time period (immediate, week after, month after, year after, four year, ten year anniversary) to reflect the rest of the sample and make the data more manageable.

A similar process was followed for articles relating to the Virginia Tech shooting. I entered the terms 'Virginia Tech' and 'shooting' into *Nexis* to retrieve all sources, bar the *TIME* and *Newsweek* ones. The following results were retrieved: 16th-17th April 2007, as 'immediate coverage' after the shooting; 18th-23rd April 2007 for the rest of the 'week after'; coverage up to a month, split into 24th-30th April 2007 and 1st-14th May2007; one year afterwards, with the dates of 15thMay2007-16thApril2008; every year for up to five years after the shooting ending 16th April 2012. I downloaded articles from *Newsweek* and *TIME* using the same search terms. The articles were not in chronological order, so I organised them into three time periods: April-May2007, June 2007-April 2008 and May 2008-April 2012.

Once I had the potential sample in place for all articles, I had to go about selecting the 'actual' articles which would be coded for research and 'dummy' ones to develop a coding scheme, a practice recommended by Altheide (1996). For all sources, I generally assigned all the first and last articles from each time period of 'immediate,' 'week after,' 'month

after,' 'one year' and 'five year'[30] to a 'dummy sample' of articles not to be included in the final sample which are used to test the protocol (Altheide 1996) by using a few examples from each source. With the newsweeklies *Newsweek* and *TIME*, I went through each article in the Columbine and Virginia Tech samples and made a judgment about its relevance to my thesis, as some only briefly mentioned the shootings and others focused on topics outside the scope of my research (such as depression drugs and films based on school shootings) — Kupchik and Bracy (2009) followed a similar procedure and excluded articles deemed out with the categories necessary for the research. I allocated a small portion of articles (ten for Virginia Tech; eight for Columbine) to the 'dummy samples.' In total, I had sixty-three articles for the overall 'dummy sample' — these articles were excluded from the 'actual sample.'

The next stage was selecting the 'actual sample' of articles to be coded. For all sources (bar *Denver Post*, *Rocky Mountain News*, *Newsweek* and *TIME* — more will be said on these momentarily), I tried a recommendation to sample every nth day for each source (Holsti 1969: 131), starting on the day of the shooting (20th April 1999) and sampling every third day until a month after the shooting; I moved to a five day sample for each month up to five years afterwards. In application, however, this did not translate so well: coverage tended to be clustered around the 20th-22nd April with some coverage on random days (e.g. the 29th April) and if a third or fifth day was missing from coverage, this skewed the rest of the sampling process. So, I instead decided to start with the second article (the first and final ones were included in the 'dummy sample') and selected every third *relevant*[31] article for up to five years after the shooting; when it came to the ten year sample (which had fewer articles overall), I switched to select every second article.

When it came to the *Denver Post* in the Columbine sample, there was a considerably larger potential sample to choose from, likely because it was the leading local newspaper. I coded every fifth article out of the relevant article population for up to five years after the shooting and on the ten year anniversary. I followed a similar process with the other leading local paper *Rocky Mountain News,* sampling every fifth article for up to a year after the shooting and thereafter every tenth one for up to five years; there were no ten year articles since *RMN* went defunct in 2007. In the case of the Virginia Tech sample, the local

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[30] I did not include ten year in the dummy sample as the potential sample for this was so small to begin with only twenty-six articles for all sources. Once the irrelevant articles (for instance, a review of a Columbine-related book) had been removed, the actual sample then became twenty.

[31] A handful of articles in each potential sample were not that relevant (e.g. what the local priest said about Columbine), so I excluded those articles from the potential sample. In the documents containing articles, I have scored through the ones which I previously used or considered irrelevant-and just moved on to the next article in the sample; the ones I did select for coding have been emboldened to help me keep track of exactly what I have coded.

papers *Roanoke Times* and *Richmond Times Dispatch* did not have an overly excessive amount of articles in the potential sample, so I simply sampled every third article (excluding irrelevant ones and those used for the 'dummy sample') for the entire population.

I decided to code all relevant articles of *TIME* and *Newsweek* (save the eighteen in the 'dummy sample'), since there were fewer results than other print media sources. The writing style of newsweeklies adheres to that of 'feature' or 'editorial' articles: these are opinionated and detailed pieces, particularly compared to traditional news stories. In their study of media bias, Groseclose and Milyo (2005) deliberately excluded editorials because of their overt political slant; whilst van Dijk (1998b: 62) argued that editorial articles may dually critique and advise specific institutions in society. The ways issues are framed is a form of 'ideological-discursive formation,' with the potential to 'naturalise' ideologies in a certain way (Fairclough 1995a: 27); this hence made it a rich source for investigating the portrayal of gun-related issues and its potential to invoke feelings of fear around school shootings.

In the end, I coded 352 articles from the 'actual' Columbine sample broken down as follows: *Daily News*, 13; *Denver Post*, 96; *New York Post*, 15; *New York Times*, 21; *Newsweek*, 26; *Rocky Mountain News*, 79; *TIME*, 53; *USA Today*, 24; *Washington Post*, 25. Similarly, I coded 376 articles for the 'actual' Virginia Tech sample, divided up like so: *Daily News,* 24; *New York Post*, 10; *New York Times*, 22; *Newsweek*, 27; *Richmond Times Dispatch,* 67; *Roanoke Times*, 98; *TIME*, 46; *USA Today,* 21; *Washington Post*, 56.

3.2 Letters to the Editor

In order to get behind the thinking of readers of selected news media sources, I decided to analyse letters to the editors. Despite only a small portion of public views, these continue, reshape and challenge on-going themes in news media content. Having said that, these are generally regarded as personal opinion rather than factual representations of events and issues; this is further exemplified by information being provided about the writer, such as age, geographical location, name and title/affiliation if applicable (Tricson *et al.*, 1989: 6, 32, 375). Something to also consider is that despite letters giving the impression that "the

newspaper is an open forum for public opinion" (Tricson *et al.* 1989: 341), they are subject to the same scrutinising of newsworthiness as other forms of news media content. The reality is newspapers do not want to alienate their readers so are unlikely to publish anything too controversial.[32] Moreover, letters also go through a controlled editorial process where they are edited to fit with layout and to 'read' better (Tricson *et al.* 1989: 334).

The selection process involved collecting all 'letters to the editor' available from my 'pool' of news media content (as outlined in the previous subsection). The letters which were not deemed relevant were removed from the sample.[33] In the end the sample selected consisted of 221 letters relating to Columbine: *Denver Post*, 94; *New York Times*, 7; *Newsweek*, 40; *Rocky Mountain News*, 3; *TIME*, 61; *USA Today*, 1; *Washington Post,* 15. For the Virginia Tech letter sample, there was a total of 65: *Newsweek*, 12; *Roanoke Times*, 24; *TIME*, 14; *USA Today*, 7; *Washington Post,* 8.

3.3 YouTube Sample

3.3.1 The Importance of Online Samples

Since it has been recommended that moral panic research now takes into account new media technologies (Cohen 2011; Hughes *et al.* 2011; Klocke and Muschert 2010), it was deemed important to include online debates in the research sample. This notion of 'self-communication' in the wake of Web 2 technologies (internet, blogs, video-sharing and so forth)has now called for a paradigm shift in who produces, mediates and consumes media discourse (O'Keefer 2012: 449). Internet users are now actively negotiating the content they engage in. The link to moral panics is particularly significant considering the lack of

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[32]An example of this would be some of the comments made on *YouTube* about victims 'deserving' to be killed.

[33] This was a technique also used by Kupchik and Bracy (2009) from a selection of *New York Times* and *USA Today* articles, those not relating to this topic were excluded from the sample. In the case of letters, several were in response to a cartoon depicting a witch 'conjuring' the Columbine shooting and this led to discussions about discriminatory portrayals of witches — something which is not really relevant to this study.

verification of content posted on internet sites (Callaghan, 2005: 180). Consequently, new media technologies allow for 'alternative' and perhaps 'controversial' viewpoints to be aired and act as 'counter-narratives' emerging to the existing moral panic (Klocke and Muschert 2010).

This thesis decided to concentrate solely on leading video-sharing site *YouTube*. This has already been the subject of analysis in only a handful of school shooting related studies (Bockler and Seeger 2013; Lindgren 2011), so there was a gap in the current literature for further explanation. The site allows users to upload videos, rate, bookmark and post written comments about videos, subscribe to channels (the equivalent to a personal page for users) and join groups (Adami, 2009: 380). In their analysis of YouTube, Burgress and Green (2009: 47-48) stated that: "Participants in *YouTube* clearly do engage in new forms of 'publishing' partly as a way to narrate and communicate their own cultural experiences." As a result of this, *YouTube* can be seen as a site of 'participatory culture' where users are able to actively contribute to and shape its content, meaning users can take on multiple roles of media audience, producers, editors, distributors of content and critics/commentators (Burgress and Green, 2009: 49, 82). A downside in the case of *YouTube* is the fact that disturbing opinions, incoherent and grammatically poor remarks, and 'colourful language' are a staple feature.

YouTube is a particularly intriguing site for researchers, as it allows for people's true feelings about perpetrators and the shootings to be expressed without any censoring — bar flagging comments as 'spam' but those can still be read by clicking on the 'show' link — which would not be the case with other avenues of public discussion such as letters to the editor; this is likely accountable to the postmodern characteristics of the internet allowing for relative anonymity and thus more open communication (see Bauman 2007; Lister *et al.* 2009; Papacharissi, 2002). It allows for people globally to contribute and to do so under a 'username' providing some degree of anonymity. Something to consider is the 'virtual community' of *YouTube* fluctuates: new users join it, whilst others taking a break from participating in it or terminate their membership completely (Bockler and Seeger, 2013: 318). Moreover, people known as 'guests' who either do not have a user account or choose not to log in are viewing but not partaking in the *YouTube* debates. This brings to mind Bauman's (2007) theory that these are 'phantom-like communities' where certain members are invisible and can leave at any time. Guests on *YouTube*, therefore, might also share or disagree with some of the opinions expressed or be influenced by them; however there is no way to know what those 'absent users' think.

Since *YouTube* is a 'content community' allowing for discussion around specific comments (Coombs, 2012: 24), it provisions more debates around school shootings to unfold and multiplicities of competing viewpoints to be 'heard' (McRobbie and Thornton 1995) and widens the availability of understandings available. This trend is summarised perfectly by Lindgren (2011: 134): "the reality of school shootings is continuously being defined in these comment threads." Depending on the dominant themes and the voices which are heard, *YouTube*, therefore, has the potential to strengthen the conditions for a moral panic to emerge. A lack of online contributions regarding a particular school shooting (such as the Red Lake, Minnesota (2005) incident which has very few videos and thus comments posted on *YouTube*), can mean that a moral panic 'fails to launch' (Jenkins 2009) or re-emerge (Klocke and Muschert 2010), as the conditions of saturated news coverage, amplified deviance and exaggerated threat were not there for this to happen.

3.3.2 Selecting a YouTube Sample

In summer 2013, I embarked on the process of selecting *YouTube* videos. The filters on the *YouTube* search function are: relevance, upload date, view count, and rating. I initially decided to take a sample based on each of those filers, amalgamate them and delete any 'overlaps' between the sub-samples. When I entered 'Columbine school shooting' into the search function and filtered them, however, the videos were becoming too irrelevant (having a very loose link to Columbine or too few comments), particularly for 'rating' and 'upload date.' Having experimented with this, I decided to search for 'Columbine school shooting' with the filter of 'relevance,' as this brought up the most videos directly related to the incident. I selected eight videos based on the 'top hits' from the search function; those which had the comments function disabled or very few comments were excluded from the sample.

In the end, the eight videos in my Columbine sample related to parts of documentaries; CCTV footage from inside the school (cafeteria); news reports broadcast on the day of the shooting; a 'music video' featuring scenes from fictional movie 'Zero Day' based on Columbine. The documentary videos had thousands of comments; whilst most other videos had hundreds and a couple had just tens.

A similar process was followed for the Virginia Tech sample of *YouTube* videos; notably, those excluded from the sample were those with zero or very few comments. The eight videos selected were a mixture of different formats: parts from a documentary; mobile phone footage from outside the Norris Hall building the day the shooting took place; a tribute video to victims of the shooting; the 'manifesto rant' sent to *NBC News* by the shooter; a couple of videos about a survivor's push for gun reform. The amount of comments was highest (thousands) for the footage and documentary videos; other videos generally had hundreds of comments, with only a handful having below one hundred.

To gain an insight into *YouTube* users' thoughts on concealed carry on campus, I selected sixteen videos. I went to the *Students for Concealed Carry* channel, where videos were ordered by date, and selected the eight most recent ones: most of these were from debates on broadcast news and comments were generally in the tens and occasionally almost a couple of hundred. To select the final eight videos, I entered 'concealed carry on campus' in the *YouTube* search function, filtered by relevance, which brought back videos featuring interviews for and against the movement; comments ranged from tens to low hundreds.

Since some videos had tens and even hundreds of thousands of comments, I narrowed down my sample of comments for all videos to one year's worth of comments posted from June 2012-June 2013. Within this time frame, interest peaked in these videos at two points: July 2012, after the mass shooting at the cinema in Aurora, Colorado; December 2012, following the incident at Sandy Hook elementary school**.** The inclusion of all comments within that time period seemed like the correct sampling process particular to *YouTube.* For instance, the 'random sampling' approach I used for the news media analysis of sampling every x number of news stories would not have translated here: it would be pointless taking every x comment since conversations can feed off each other in an on-going thread. Moreover, if there is a notable time period between postings —say, a year — it is likely to be a standalone comment rather than a contribution to an on-going thread. With that in mind, I started from the last comment and worked my way back to trace discussions**.**

3.4 Official Policy Documents

Klocke and Muschert (2010: 18) noted that official policy documents are a potentially rich data source for analysing moral panics. Framing within policy documents allows for a more focused approach to solving an issue, by highlighting certain aspects of it and then formulating solutions to them (Birkland and Lawrence, 2009: 1406). I was interested in recommendations offered by prominent sources shortly after both shootings framed around: crisis management and communication; gun purchasing, ownership and the concealed carry on campus movement.[34] The evolution of policy development was also traced by examining long-term policy documents.

The 'immediate' Virginia Tech policy sample published during up to a year after the shooting consisted of the following sources:

> Federal sources: 'Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy,' published in June 2007; 'Expecting the Unexpected: Lessons from the Virginia Tech Tragedy,' published in November 2007;
> State-level document: 'Report of the Virginia Tech Review Panel. Presented to Timothy M. Kaine, Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia,' first published in June 2007 and updated in 2009 — both sources have been assessed;
> Internal *Virginia Tech University* reviews: 'Information and Communications Infrastructure,' 'Security Infrastructure Working Group,' 'Presidential Internal Review: Working Group on the Interface between Virginia Tech Counselling Services, Academic Affairs, Judicial Affairs and Legal Systems.' All were published in August 2007.

The reasoning behind this selection of federal, state and internal sources is that the federal level report offers some general recommendations for areas needing further exploration — a starting point, as it were — and this then feeds into more localised policy exploration in the form of the state-level report sanctioned by the Virginia Governor, Tim Kaine, and

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[34] Suggestions are they pertain to violence prevention, safety measures, security procedures, medical responses and longer term victim support and so forth are not covered here since they fall outside the remit of the research objective in hand.

internal institutional reviews by *Virginia Tech University* itself to identify areas which need strengthening.

The long-term sample of reports published from 2009 onwards, thereafter, sought to trace the patterns of evolution:

> The federal-level report: 'Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education,' published in April 2010, examining more general campus violence and spectacular attacks like the Virginia Tech shooting;
> State legislative changes made in emergency management planning and training and crisis notification, from 2009 onwards;
> Internal *Virginia Tech University* documentation: Crisis and Emergency Management Plan, Policies and Procedures: Campus and Workplace Violence Prevention Policy; and Policies and Procedures: University Safety and Security, both published throughout 2012.

Again, the federal level sources are more generalised, but do offer further investigations into ways to improve. The state-level legislative changes illustrate the setting of legal guidelines; whilst the internal *Virginia Tech University* documents offer a model of how these requirements have translated into actual plans and policies.

The Columbine sample followed a similar pattern. For immediate sources published in 1999-2001, it consisted of:

> A federal level report: 'The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective,' a FBI study tracing patterns in school shooting incidents, published in 1999;.
> State-level investigation: 'The Report of Governor Bill Owens: Columbine Review Commission,' published in May 2001;

There were no <u>internal reports</u> conducted by *Columbine High* itself, which is one notable difference from the Virginia Tech sample

The federal level report was prompted by the Columbine shooting and notes commonalities between the perpetrators and actual incidences of school shootings. The state-level investigation is more extensive and offers recommendations on how to address weaknesses.

The long-term sample of material from 2002 onwards was a bit more expansive:

<u>Two federal-level reports</u>: 'The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States,' a collaboration between the *US Secret Service* and *Department of Education* published in May 2002; 'Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent a Targeted Attack,' a similar collaboration published in May 2008;

<u>State-level legislative changes</u> relating to emergency management and communication, implemented in 2002 and later;

There were no <u>internal *Columbine High* documents</u> available.

The federal-level reports examined a number of school shooting incidents to identify patterns; whilst state-level statutes implemented provide some indication of changes which have been made.

3.5 School Safety Research Participants

3.5.1 School Safety Symposium

During the course of my policy-related research, I came across a 'Symposium' (see http://thebriefings.org/) to be held at Columbine High School in June 2013 to have 'on-going conversations' about school safety. This event was organised by the non-profit foundation *I Love U Guys* (see http://iloveuguys.org/) set up by John-Michael and Ellen Keyes, the parents of Emily Keyes: a young girl killed in a hostage situation at *Platte Canyon High School*, Bailey, Colorado (2006) and who had sent her father a text message before her death (see figure 7 below). Speakers at the 2013 Symposium included academic experts, legal advisors, school shooting survivors, relatives of victims, and SWAT officers who have dealt with such situations. The subjects covered that were relevant to my work were emergency communication, law enforcement tactics, and emergency preparedness.

Figure 7: Text message sent by Emily, inspiring the name *I Love U Guys*[35]

4.5.2 Interviewees

I established contact with the emergency management director for Jefferson County, John McDonald,[36] after meeting him at the 'Symposium.' Once I had an awareness of his

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[35] This image was taken from: *I Love U Guys* (n.d.) 'Home Page.' *http://iloveuguys.org/*.
[36] Whether to name interviewees or not was discussed with my primary supervisor before I submitted my ethics form. In the end, we theorised that since most interviewees are members of activist groups, it is likely that they will want at the very least the campaign group to be mentioned even if they themselves are anonymised. Based on the justification

expertise in this area and his previous experience of working with law enforcement, I conducted an email interview to question him about topics relating to people's feelings about law enforcement and the emergency management plan for *Columbine High School*.

In a similar vein, from a connection made at the School Safety Symposium, I was able to arrange an interview with a spokesperson[37] from the organisation which devised the *LiveSafe* (www.LiveSafe.ly) smartphone app (see figure 8 below for home screen of app). The app is available to download for free anywhere in the U.S. and, therefore, is technically for everyone to use; however, its main usage is around higher education institutions and a couple of high schools in the East Coast. Its features mainly centre on reporting potential threats or being able to deal with a crisis should it occur. The features of this app allow: people to report crimes or other incidents such as car accidents and features a two way communicative feature with the police; tracking of users' locations; a mass emergency notification resource; safety mapping of incidents (*LiveSafe* n.d.).

Figure 8: Homescreen of *LiveSafe*.[38]

we presented for this, using the real names of interviewees was given ethical approval. However, I was mindful of the fact that perhaps some interviewees would not want this and so all interviewees were given the choice whether they wanted their group/affiliation and/or their name to be anonymised. In the end, all bar two of my interviewees said they wished to be named and so I have obliged.

[37] This interviewee wanted their organisation to be named but did not confirm willingness about themselves and is therefore anonymised by default.

[38] This image was taken from a screen grab of the *LiveSafe* application on my phone. I was able to download it when I was in the United States.

4.6 Gun-Related Research Participants

To keep this thesis within a reasonable scope, the focus was exclusively on organisations dedicated to reducing gun violence to get behind their thinking and what they prescribe as solutions to address this problem. For that reason, other interest groups interested in gun policy but not *exclusively* focusing on gun violence, such as the *National Rifle Association (NRA)*, have not been included in the sample. Groups like the *NRA* who represent gun owners and the industry are pertinent to strengthening the U.S.'s 'gun culture' (Squires, 2000: 204). Avenues for future research, therefore, could be to find out more about the conflation of guns with U.S. culture by speaking to 'gun rights' organisations like the *NRA*.

Whilst conducting my content analysis on news media content, I noted down commonly mentioned GVP interest groups and also supplemented my knowledge through online research and further reading. As it transpired, the sample of interviewees used consisted of representatives from five gun violence prevention[39] (GVP)[40] groups, a specialist who has written gun legislation and co-founded a think tank, and a political pollster who worked with the Governor of Virginia. These interviewees were selected for their prominence in policy debates at state and national levels. A very small sample of interviewees is used here, so findings cannot be seen to be reflective of nation-wide efforts. I was interested in speaking to the 'ideologues' — those in leadership positions expected to be able propagate ideologies (van Dijk, 1998a: 172) — and so my selection of interviewees involved those in presidential or public relations positions. Almost all interviewees requested that they and their organisation were to be named.

The seven gun-related research participants in order of interview are:

-Eileen McCarron, president of *Colorado Ceasefire Capitol Fund* (*CC*), a nonpartisan political action committee formed in 2000;

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[39] These would typically be known as 'gun control' or 'anti-gun' groups; however, both of these terms are problematic. 'Gun Control' has negative connotations for some (this will be discussed in more detail throughout this chapter), whereas 'anti-gun' implies an extreme ethos predicated in disdain or hatred for guns which the interviewees I spoke to do not possess. Therefore, it seemed fair to call them 'gun violence prevention' since that is their main concern and area for action.

[40] For ease of reading, this will be abbreviated to GVP from now on.

-Andrew Goddard, president of *Virginia Center for Public Safety* (*VCPS*) formed in 1992 in response to a crime wave in Norfolk, Virginia;

-Cathie Whittenburg, president of *States United to Prevent Gun Violence* (*SUPGV*), an organisation bringing together individual states, which was formed around 1999/2000;

-Ladd Everitt, communications director of *Coalition to Stop Gun Violence* (*CSGV*), formed back in the middle of the civil rights movement, which turned its attention in the late 1970s from public education work to preventing gun violence;

-Jim Kessler, formerly Director of Policy and Research at GVP interest group, *Americans for Gun Safety* (*AGS*),. This has now merged into the centrist think tank *Third Way* (*TW*), which Jim Kessler is both co-founder and Senior Vice President of. *TW* does still focus on gun violence, but also looks at a whole range of other issues from the economy to climate change.

-Pete Brodnitz, political pollster at the *Benenson Strategy Group*, founded in 2000 to conduct public opinion research for corporations and elective candidates, with the most recent high-profile client being President Barack Obama.

-A representative from a leading gun violence prevention organisation with offices in Washington, D.C. No further information can be provided about its foundation since the interviewee and group requested anonymisation.

Colorado Ceasefire and *Virginia Center for Public Safety* are state groups based in Colorado and Virginia, where the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings took place respectively. The lobbying component of *Colorado Ceasefire,* known as its political action committee (PAC), formally endorses political candidates and gives financial donations as part of this: this bestows a degree of accountability upon the candidate to support the goals of the group and influence legislation (Rozell *et al.*, 2006: 89, 121). *States United* is a national-level group bringing state level groups together and facilitating their campaigns. The *Coalition to Stop Gun Violence* group is based in Washington, D.C. and involved in

federal level debates at the Capitol. Finally, *Americans for Gun Safety* was successful in drafting a bill tightening the law regarding mental health restrictions on purchasing guns and funded research into gun reform measures in Colorado and Oregon. The now-merged think tank *Third Way* focuses on a number of issues, including guns, and was described by the *New York Times* as 'a constant presence in Washington.' Think tanks are also useful in tracking policy debates since they develop policy proposals for party leaders (Rozell *et al.*,2006: 17). Additionally, Jim Kessler himself, during his time as an advisor to Senator Schumer, helped write the assault weapons ban (1994-2004) and the Brady Law (1994). The political pollster, Pete Brodnitz, worked with Americans for Gun Safety and helped them improve their strategies (more on this in chapter eleven); he was also an adviser to previous Virginia Governor, Tim Kaine, who was in office at the time of the Virginia Tech shooting. Lastly, the representative from the anonymous GVP group is fundamental since it is one of the leading organisations and has offices in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C.

4. Methodological Approach and Process

Introduction

It has been recommended by Holsti (1969: 27) that a good research design should incorporate theory, data gathering, analysis and interpretation. The research methods chosen for this thesis were based on the previous studies and theoretical paradigms outlined in chapter two. The aim of this chapter is to provide a descriptive synopsis of the research carried out, alongside the epistemological philosophies guiding my approach. Firstly, I will go through the philosophical stance of my research: constructionism as a starting point and critical realism as a 'compromised' version of this; alongside 'reflexivity' to address any assumptions that can go alongside an ethnographic approach. After that, I will go through the ethical dimensions of the research to justify the recruitment and interviewing of participants, protecting the identities of *YouTube* users, and how data involving research participants was handled throughout the course of the research. The next two sections will go through the processes of conducting content and critical discourse analyses to explore news media-policy linkages and reveal the entrenchment of ideologies in public sentiments about gun-related issues. I will then turn to discuss how the 'voices' of research participants were captured: recruiting gun-related research participants; carrying out two stages of interviews and attending the *Mayors Against Illegal Guns* event; assessing official policy documents; attending the 'School Safety Symposium'; the two 'school safety' interviews which were conducted. The coda of this chapter provides explanations of how interview and presentation data were transcribed and analysed.

4.1 Epistemological Stance: Critical Realism and Reflexivity

The epistemological stance I am using is 'critical realism,' which has its groundings in the philosophy of 'constructionism.' The constructionist paradigm rejects the positivistic quest for objective 'value free' research that assumes an independent 'reality' to that of the researcher (Trigg, 1985: 106, 118). In constructionism, knowledge and reality are formed

by social interactions (Crotty, 1998: 42-43); this means that there can be multiple, valid explanations about the same phenomenon (Hammersley, 1992: 51). To take this argument further, Berger and Luckman (1967: 15) emphasised relativity where the 'knowledge' of the criminal is different to that of the criminologist; meaning researchers should explore how 'knowledge' is socially constructed to represent 'reality' in different social contexts. Since sociology is concerned with exploring the collective phenomenon of society such as groups and institutions (Hughes and Sharrock 1990; Mills 1959), a constructionist approach allows for the social construction of reality to be unpacked with language being the most important signifier of meaning (Berger and Luckman 1967).

A problem with the constructionist paradigm is the 'universal constructivism' it promotes that both natural and social realities are constructed; hence, making the "'epistemic fallacy' of confusing the nature of reality with our knowledge of reality" (Fairclough, 2005: 922). An alternative 'compromise' stance that is based upon social constructivism but separates epistemology from ontology (see Fairclough 2005) is 'critical realism,' which is the philosophy commonly utilised in discourse studies (see, for instance, Fairclough 1989, 1995a; Fowler 1991; van Dijk 1998a, 1998b). This philosophy is rooted in Bhaskar's (1998: 9) notion that human sciences are "intrinsically critical and self-critical." Building upon this argument, the point is made that studies of social reality are both 'value impregnated' and 'value impregnating,' meaning that human sciences are "never neutral in their consequences" (Bhaskar, 1998: 9, 103). This rejects the positivistic stance that a 'value-free' social science, seeking to emulate that of its natural counterpart, is possible (Hughes and Sharrock, 1990: 42). Realism in ethnographic methodology promoted the idea that researchers can understand different meanings through sustained contact with people in their everyday situations. Hammersley (1992: 50) challenged this as being quite a crude/naïve approach to take, for the underlying assumption is: "If we could only get rid of…our cultural preconceptions, we would be able to see reality itself." In contrast, Hammersley (1992: 53) advocated a 'reflexive' approach of foregoing assumptions about what the research findings will be by dually viewing people's actions and beliefs as constructions of reality, whilst acknowledging the cultural values and assumptions of the researcher.

What is particularly interesting about reflexivity is the role of the researcher in the process: "What one writes about...is influenced by the social location of the writer...'knowledge' is not, after all, independent of the social and political positions of the person who 'knows'" (Collier 1998: 52). It may, therefore, be deduced that researchers

choose a topic specifically because they have experience of it or it intrigues them or builds upon their own pre-existing knowledge — most likely, without this interest and knowledge the research would be especially challenging. As explicated in the introduction chapter, my interest in the topic lies in my experiences. Furthermore, throughout the research process, I followed Sapsford and Jupp's (2006: 89) recommendation to constantly reflect in order to understand my role in data collection. The role of reflexivity will be something I refer to later on in this chapter, when outlining how I went interviewing research participants.

4.2 Ethical Considerations of Research and Data

To ensure an ethically sound research process, I adhered to the practice requirements of the *University of Glasgow* and the *British Sociological Association*. There were two areas in particular that required consideration: interviews with research participants; analysing *YouTube* comments. Analysing news media content and policy documents do not require the same levels of ethical concern, as they are secondary documents already in the public sphere.

4.2.1 Interviews

Being mindful of obtaining 'informed consent,' the recruitment process utilised the email address publicly available on organisation's websites or mailing list to make contact with potential participants. The only exceptions to this were the two interviewees recruited via the 'snowball method' of other research participants referring me to them *after* inquiring with them whether they would be interested in participating. I made it clear to interviewees that consenting to participate in the study was optional and those who no longer wanted to take part were under no obligation to do so. Consent forms and information sheets were sent to potential participants before interview times and dates were arranged. Further, I went through the terms of the consent form with them and answered any questions they had to ensure that they felt comfortable with everything. Of key importance here was 'respectfulness' and building trust where participants were treated like people and not just research subjects (MacFarlane, 2009: 63; Ryan, 2007: 222). Interviewees then had to sign

the consent forms to illustrate that they understood what the research would entail and that they agreed to its terms.

One issue which is perhaps different from a number of other research projects is the fact that I gave my interviewees the option to be named and/or their affiliated organisation to be named. It was felt that although my research project involves the sensitive topic of gun violence, the main focus is on policy responses to the shootings. I personally felt that taking away even the *option* of being named was presupposing vulnerability about the research participants whose professional focus is to advocate against gun violence or improve school safety.

When I was in the process of submitting the ethics form, my supervisor, Sarah, and I discussed this and decided that interviewees should, at the very least, have the *option* of being named. I made a case for this in my ethics form, stating that if interviewees did not agree or confirm to be named then, by default, they would be anonymised. I also offered the options of: part-name, part-pseudonym or just their organisation to be named for those who did not want complete anonymity but did not want to use their full name/affiliation. This gained ethical approval and all interviewees were informed about this before, during and after interviews in case they changed their minds at any stage.

As it turned out, one interviewee wished complete anonymity for themselves and their organisation; whilst another did not confirm whether they wanted their real name to be used but did state they wanted their organisation to be. All other interviewees wanted their names and organisations to be named, probably with the view in mind that it might allow their voices to be 'heard' and they have control over what is published. To clarify, I sent all interviewees being named the quotes I intended to use for them to check[41] and the full interview transcripts: this was particularly important to me because I did not want to misquote them, whilst identifying them. The process of keeping research participants updated about the research is a positive research practice recommended by MacFarlane (2009: 63).Interviewees were happy with their quotes, although some asked me to remove everyday conversational phrases like 'um,' 'uh' and 'you know.' I felt that these additional phrases add to the word count without really adding anything to the discussion and that the

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[41] This is a practice I intend to continue even publishing anything from my thesis. Once I leave the *University of Glasgow*, I intend to send my new email address to participants so they can contact me with any questions and also so I can get in touch if I publish anything in future for interviewees to check quotes and also to keep them informed in general.

quotes already were 'authentic' in terms of how sentences were phrased and cut off, so there did not seem to be any issues with their removal.

In the case of the two events I attended, these were publicly presented and speakers, therefore, did not have to worry about saying something unwanted as they may do in an interview context. I spoke to two gatekeepers at each event to inform them of my intentions to use the presentations in my thesis; following examination of the thesis, I will also send them the chapters in which materials from the events appeared.

Interviews and participant observations were recorded on audio equipment and via email correspondence in the case of one interview. Interview and participant observation transcripts were stored on the university hard-drive, which is password-protected, and personal memory sticks, which are either always on my person or locked away in my home. Transcripts will be stored until two years after thesis submission in case there is any need to revisit; after this period, the transcriptions will then be destroyed. This adheres to the regulations of the 'British Data Protection Act' (1988) in terms of storing data.

4.2.2 YouTube

It has been said that online content poses new ethical dilemmas for researchers because of the unclear nature of whether it is public or private (Ryan, 2007: 224). To negate this issue, I protected the identities of *YouTube* users. Comment threads were paraphrased rather than directly quoted and no user names were cited.

The only real risk to me as a researcher on *YouTube* was possibly being targeted by users if my identity was to be revealed. I do not have a *YouTube* account and thus was an invisible 'guest' on the site able to view publicly available comments anonymously. Furthermore, I was unable to participate in any discussions, but there was no real need in this study to converse with *YouTube* users, as I was interested in how others deliberate matters relating to school shootings. Moreover, I was not interested in assessing any criminal conduct (for instance, people stating they would like to carry out a school

shooting); although I had in mind during analysis that if I were to observe a credible threat[42], I would anonymously report this to the relevant authorities.

4.3 Exploring News Media-Policy Linkages: Content Analysis

This thesis explores how news media content constructs a culture of fear and any possible linkages to emerging policy debates around the emergency management of school shootings, and gun debates. The way the media contextualises an issue defines its parameters for policy formation (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005: 2, 4). On this relationship, Rochefort and Cobb (1994: 9) state: "If policy-making is a struggle over alterative realities, then language is the media that reflects, advances and interprets these alternatives." The first line of inquiry, therefore, in exploring this is to analyse the use of 'framing' in both news media and policy content. A social constructionist interpretation recognises that "public policy is 'constructed' through the language in which it is described" (Fischer, 2003: 43). Notably, within public discourses, school shootings are commonly dually framed through an implied problem-solution package; this tends to be quite narrow and rudimentary in its focus (Muschert, 2013: 276-277). This parallels Altheide's (1997) problem frame components where the 'solution' and 'processes' and 'agents' to achieve the resolution to a constructed 'problem' are promoted.

In order to analyse emerging themes from news media content and the gun and emergency management policy responses, the research method of content analysis was deemed to be the most suitable. Content analysis involves counting the occurrences of subjects/themes, words/phrases, actors or dispositions and has been defined as: "A method for inquiring into social reality that consists of inferring features of a non-manifest context from features of a manifest text" (Krippendorff, 1980: 15). It was employed during the 1940s to make inferences from Nazi propaganda — this is most commonly associated with the work of Harold Lasswell (Holsti, 1969: 22). Since then it has grown in popularity and has extended to other 'texts' (or 'documents') that may be interpreted in numerous ways;

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[42] Threat assessment literature (e.g. Vossekuil *et al.* 2002) indicates that 'serious threats' tend to be the ones which consist of concrete detailed plans, indicating that the user has considered it. It is a more credible threat than a one-time posting 'I want to kill people at my school,' that could just be influenced by the user's emotional mood at that point in time.

these only arise upon someone 'reading' and hence engaging with the text (Krippendorff, 2004: 22-24).

Qualitative content analysts have questioned whether the frequency of occurrence alone is actually enough to signify its importance (Holsti, 1969: 10). The reasoning for this is that, in order to understand their meaning, the occurrences counted need to be placed within a theoretical, qualitative-based framework (Anders, 1998a: 96); it is as Sumner (1979: 69) stated: "It is not the significance of repetition that is important but rather the repetition of significance". This is achieved by assessing 'themes' (recurring ideas throughout the report) and 'frames' (the parameters of what will be discussed about an event) (Altheide, 1996: 31).

4.3.1 Official Policy Documents

I started out with the intention to analyse the security implications of the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings. Firstly, I created a protocol (see appendix C) to help me extrapolate the main ideas from each policy document. I then went through the laborious process of reading the entire document, highlighting pertinent parts and leaving comments; I followed the same process as with all other documents in the sample. This allowed me to develop a coding scheme to apply to the same dataset. This created the main category 'Security and Safety,' consisting of suggestions and implementations to improve staff and student safety within university campuses. I began to write up the security-related findings from the research; however, from readings conducted, I was aware of what had already been written on the debate and felt I did not have anything 'new' to add to the discussion. What did interest me, however, was the focus on emergency preparedness in policy documents —particularly as I felt this was a neglected area in research (see Dumitriu 2013) —and the strands of this: law enforcement tactics, planning, and emergency communication. These aspects of the 'security and safety' category were analysed and cross-referenced using the secondary category of 'bureaucratic procedures,' referring to the details involved in policy design and implementation from the actors involved to procedures which must be followed: key relationships to be formed, training to be undertaken, legislative requirements and hierarchical structure.

4.3.2 Interrogating a Culture of Fear

In this section, I will explicate the content analysis procedure for examining the culture of fear. The first step was to develop a coding scheme for the Columbine news media and letters sample (1999-2004, 2009) and then apply that to the Virginia Tech dataset (2007-2012). Overall, the coding schemes were similar, but with slight nuances reflecting the differences between the two incidents, with Columbine causing more of a 'fearful' reaction than Virginia Tech. I followed the qualitative content analysis procedure specified by Altheide (1996): formulation of categories and creation of a data collection sheet (protocol); testing of protocol using a few examples in a 'dummy sample'; revising and adding to protocol if necessary; collection of data, coding sample and highlighting concepts; comparing and contrasting each category with brief summaries; combining these summaries and then illustrating the conclusion with examples of 'typical' and 'extreme' cases. Codes were generated and developed iteratively allowing for unforeseen categories to arise. The benefit of this interpretative approach is that "no priority is given to any 'expected' themes" (Wondemaghen, 2013: 5). Consequently, this process resulted in the 'counteractive culture of fear' category and sub-codes within it of 'rarity,' 'lack of fear,' and reassurances: these were surprising because they challenged, to some degree, claims of previous research (e.g. Brooks *et al.* 2000; Burns and Crawford 1999; Killingbeck 2001; Lawrence and Mueller 2003) that the media distorted the risk of school shootings. As will be demonstrated in chapter five, however, the impact of this category as a means of negating moral panics and a climate of fear is questionable.

It has been said the categorisation of information has conceptual power because it links together common strands (Strauss and Carbin, 1990: 305). Always present in both coding schemes were the four categories of: 'changing definitions,' referring to codes which suggest Columbine or Virginia Tech has reshaped pre-conceived ideas about school shootings; 'reassurances,' highlighting that gun and school/campus violence is on the decline and chances of being killed in a school shooting are very rare; 'pertinence of Columbine/Virginia Tech,' grouping together possible explanations why these incidents became so notorious; 'reactions,' bringing together codes which show the *perceived* risks of school shooting attacks. The presence of themes within each of these categories was nuanced to each dataset of news media, letters and *YouTube*. A possible explanation for this is the news media and letters datasets were a large sample of material and taken from a different time period, so perhaps that explains the absence of certain codes in *YouTube*

comments, or it could reflect the increasing prominence of certain themes in contemporary society (June 2012-2013). One of these, for example, was the *YouTube* code about the shootings not being massacre because they 'only' had a small death toll — this is indicative of the uncontrolled nature of *YouTube* in comparison to the news media and letters which go through a strict editorial process. The coding schemes for each dataset are available upon request.

Pertinent to a content analysis being methodologically sound is taking steps to ensure reliability and validity of results. Reliability of findings is evident when other analysts could replicate the research and obtain similar findings. To ensure reliability, I employed coding in a systematic manner, i.e. according to predefined guidelines to instil some degree of objectivity into the process (Holsti, 1969: 135, 3-4) — although to ensure fluidity of coding, I was aware of the fact that criteria may evolve as the research unfolds (see Wondemaghen 2013). Moreover, I am transparent in documenting the coding procedures used and the formation of categories. The other feature needed is validity, relating to how valid the findings are, i.e. if it measured what it intended to (Holsti, 1969: 142). To achieve validity in content analyses, I made sure: the sample was representative of the larger body of work; the categories are exhaustive (i.e. each item can be placed into a category) and units with relevant meanings/connotations were grouped together; and that coding procedures were representative of concepts guiding the research (Holsti, 1969: 93, 99, 142-143).

4.3.3 Blaming Official Actors

In my analyses discussed above, I also noticed the emerging themes of blaming official actors, which differed for each sample: in the case of Columbine, the law enforcement response was criticised; whilst the officials at *Virginia Tech University* were commonly blamed for that shooting. To explore these themes further, I utilised qualitative content analysis to assess the duality of blame/responsibility within news media content, letters, and *YouTube* discourses. The definition of certain issues as problems is described as a "process of image-making, where the images have to do fundamentally with attributing cause, blame and responsibility" (Stone, 1989: 282). The analytical approach I used to specifically assess the related news media content was examining 'frames' of discourse. Framing is a process of making certain elements of a topic salient via 'priming' techniques,

like prominent placement, components *excluded* from stories, and repetition of the included elements (see Entman 1993, 2007; Goffman 1974). These can be presented thematically by putting events in context, or episodically by looking at specific events or actors (see Iyengar 1991); the criteria for selecting which elements of a story to cover tend to be rooted in news values (see, for example, Galtung and Ruge 1965/1973).

4.3.4 Concealed Carry on Campus

In order to explore the arguments for and against this movement, I turned to the contemporary source of *YouTube* to discover users' sentiments. To generate key themes, I employed qualitative content analysis once again using Altheide's (1996) process and the iterative approach recommended by Wondemaghen (2013). This resulted in the following categories: 'Concealed Carry on Campus,' encompassing all facets of the debate: whether this is a good idea, justifications for it, concerns, and how it would translate in reality; Self-Defence Ideology, encapsulating all aspects of the notion that more guns leads to better protection and the factors driving this, such as perceptions about law enforcement, criminals and threats; Virginia Tech and Other School Shootings, showing that school shootings, particularly Virginia Tech, are used as a way to frame and interpret the concealed carry on campus issue. Given themes emerged 'naturally' as per the iterative approach (Wondemaghen 2013), those which I was the most surprised about were the perceptions around: doubting law enforcement's ability to protect individuals; criminals targeting places with concealed carry bans; the Virginia Tech shooting being blamed on its concealed carry ban.

4.4 Uncovering Fear and Ideologies: Critical Discourse Analysis

My next goal was to gain a deeper insight into representations of the culture of fear in news media content and public sentiments regarding fear, emergency management and guns. Given its usefulness for investigating media influence (see Fairclough 1995a; van Dijk 1988), critical discourse analysis was believed to be the most appropriate research methodology to, firstly, explore the potential for the news media to create the conditions

for a culture of fear. Furthermore, Mayr and Machin (2012) found that a critical approach was useful for revealing more subtle nuances — which may have far-reading implications — in crime reporting.

Additionally, this approach allowed me to "reveal what is obscured by ideology" (Hammersley, 2002: 244) in narratives (news media, letter and *YouTube* discourses) and the wider meanings surrounding two areas of policy debate: emergency management and guns. Ideologies may be defined as 'hegemonic representations' of social reality shared by members of groups (van Dijk, 1998a: 8, 29). The concept 'hegemony' was elaborated upon — but not originally conceptualised by — the theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971), who defined it as a means of exercising power over subordinate members of society by transferring the ideologies of the dominant class into 'common sense' understandings. When this occurs, ideology "disguises its ideological nature" (Fairclough, 1995a: 82) and thus becomes 'naturalised' appearing routine and acceptable. This viewpoint is consistent with Lukes's (1977/2005) third dimension of power, which maintains that this form of power is the most insidious given its ability to 'naturalise' people's beliefs and values. Struggle for hegemony occurs when ideologies are 'denaturalised' and replaced with others (Fairclough, 1995a: 94). In this sense, discourse is able to dominate via achieving consent via acceptance of some ideologies rather than coercion (Fairclough, 1995b: 67). A Gramscian interpretation of power, however, must be taken with some degree of scepticism, as it puts too much emphasis on the power of discourse. Moreover, power is not only just exercised *over* people; it can also travel *between* agents (Lukes, 1974/2005: 64).

The 'power behind discourse' (Fairclough 1989) is the potential of discourse to promote, challenge and reproduce ideologies (Fairclough, 1995a: 18). The media is said to play a key role in ideological struggles (Philo 2007, 2008; interested readers are directed to *Glasgow Media Group*'s work). It has been argued that "news implicitly promotes the dominant beliefs and opinions of the elite groups in society" (van Dijk, 1998a: 82-83). This could happen to some extent through only including certain elements of a story or slanting it in a particular way, as this portrayal then influences how the media audience interpret events (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 114). Current conflicts, divisions and wider social processes are vital to understanding language (Philo, 2007: 178). It must be stated, however, that the media audience do not just mindlessly accept news media content. As Fowler (1991: 41) points out: "The newspaper does not select events to be reported and then consciously wrap them in value-laden language which the reader passively absorbs, ideology and all." A more convincing argument is that readers actively 'read in' — as

opposed to 'reading off' — the ideological points of discourse (Fowler, 1991: 46). It is perhaps more advisable to have a dual approach of recognising the power operating through discourse through a number of *preferable* meanings as opposed to a singular dominant thesis; and acknowledging that readers are engaged in a process of reading discourse, such as using logic to make inferences (Philo, 2008: 540).

On completion of the content analyses for each of the datasets relating to the culture of fear, blaming official actors and concealed carry on campus, critical discourse analysis was conducted to allow for a deeper examination of the representations and understandings of school shootings. Critical discourse analysis was carried out by exploring the components of the media-moral panic relationship as specified by Cohen (1972/2002): exaggeration and distortion, prediction, and symbolization; I also assessed emotive language and narrative techniques pertaining to ideologies of anxiety, fear and threat. Since certain words/phrases may act as signifiers 'denoting' or 'standing for' value judgments, these became a unit of analysis for me to explore the standpoints of writers. The sentences, paragraphs and whole context (letter or article) in which these occurred were also used to put pertinent phrases/words into context (as per the recommendations of Parlmer, 1976/1981: 17, 37; van Dijk, 1998b: 31-32). Lexical techniques informing the analytical framework were: paralinguistic features conveying speech like intonation, stress, rhythm; hyperbole, which is an overstatement of the original fact; contrastive stress in the form of italics emphasising a particular point; colloquialisms, such as idioms and slang, giving the discourse an informal feel; irony between what is said and the context, usually portrayed by the use of scare quotes; metaphors, evoking connotations (emotive/evaluative meanings); signifiers, constructing reality in a particular way, which are utilised for persuasion; hedging, a form of meta-discourse to deride something through phrases like 'sort of' and 'kind of' (Fowler, 1991; Fairclough 1992; Garland 1985; Mayr and Machin 2012; Parlmer, 1976/1981; Semino 2008).

The limitation of this is perhaps that it is does not locate articles within wider signifiers like position in newspaper and accompanying images. As I retrieved my news media dataset from the archival database Nexis only the articles themselves were available to me, thus removing the possibility of examining any further elements such as photographs, page layout and so forth. In retrospect, I think this offered me an opportunity to deepen my analyses of the language and the social contexts in which discourses were

circulating. Future research could build upon my findings to be discussed in chapter five by also looking at imagery used and the positioning of news stories.

4.5 Voices from School Safety and Gun-Related Actors: Interviews and Participant Observation

A social constructionist approach emphasises social actors are actively engaged in the process of framing (Fischer, 2003: 85). Key actors in the policy-making process, such as elected officials, interest groups, the media and political parties, use framing to "define political space and erect the boundaries within which a public policy issue will be considered" (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005: xii). I was interested in the way gun-related (interest groups, political pollster; think tank director) and school safety interviewees framed solutions on how to reduce school shootings.

In order to do this, I used the research method of interviewing. It has been said that qualitative interviewers "seek an inter-subjective bridge between themselves and their respondent to allow them to imaginatively share their respondent's world" (Bloor and Wood, 2006: 104). Kvale (1996: 14) takes this point further:

> An interview is literally an inter-view: an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a common theme, where the interviewer collaborates with the interviewee to produce the interviewee's description of their social reality.

Since these allow the researcher to examine the opinions, ideas and experiences of interviewees, qualitative interviews are considered higher in validity than their quantitative counterparts (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 96).

By attending a 'School Safety' symposium (June 2013) and a *Mayors Against Illegal Guns* 'No More Names' event (September 2013) in Colorado and Washington, D.C. respectively, I also ended up carrying out a form of participant observation; this has been defined as a process in which "the observer is in a face-to-face context with the observed" (Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955: 334). The purpose of this research methodology is to allow the researcher to be part of the context under investigation and is probably the most effective technique for witnessing social change as it occurs (Schwartz and Schwartz,

1955: 334; Vidich, 1955: 359). I adopted the 'passive participant observer' stance of observing events as they developed and having little contact with the observed; herein, I remained an outsider and relatively anonymous (Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955: 348). It has been contested that the social and cultural position of the observer will affect *what* they observe (Vidich, 1955: 354) — I reject such an interpretation of ethnographic approach, instead drawing upon the reflexive stance of all observations being value-laden (Hammersley, 1992: 50).

4.5.1 School Safety Symposium

The 'School Safety Symposium' (2013), organised by the *I Love U Guys* foundation and held at *Columbine High School* (see figure 9 below), was a source for knowledge on emergency management procedures.

Figure 9: Ceiling at *Columbine High School* dedicated to the thirteen killed.[43]

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[43] This photograph was taken by me during my attendance at the 'School Safety Symposium' at *Columbine High School*, Littleton, Colorado.

When attending the conference in June 2013, I took notes during presentations, whilst discussions with key speakers addressed any queries I had. The whole experience of attending the conference was emotionally draining because of the background of presenters: there was a parent who lost her daughter in the Sandy Hook shooting; the principal of Columbine High who had been there the day of the shooting; the *I Love U Guys* director, John Michael Keyes, recalled losing his daughter at a hostage situation in Platte Canyon High. The sharing of thoughts and feelings from survivors and relatives of victims, as well as being in the actual school where the victims of the Columbine shooting took place, really exemplified the pain that people affected by school shootings —or hostage situation in the case of the Platte Canyon High incident—are feeling. Near to the school was the memorial (see figure 10 below) set up for the thirteen murdered[44]**,** visiting this was also an emotional experience.

Shortly after April 20, 1999, there was an outpouring of flowers, notes, poems, ribbons, stuffed animals, pictures and other objects brought to Clement Park to pay tribute to those that died, were injured or traumatized. From that initial outpouring of emotions and disbelief came the concept of establishing a permanent public memorial near the high school, a memorial that would serve to honor those innocent victims but also provide a historic record of this tragedy and to deliver a message of hope for many generations to come.

Figure 10: Plaque at Memorial Site[45]

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[44] I say 'murdered' here to distinguish between the thirteen (twelve students and one teacher) who were killed by the perpetrators and the shooters themselves who committed suicide. An important point to note is that nowhere in the school or at the memorial were the two shooters memorialised or even mentioned.

[45] This photograph was taken by me at the Columbine Memorial Site, which is behind *Columbine High School*.

It was a beneficial experience and actually encouraged me to push forward and complete my thesis, especially when I saw how much the issue meant to people. An example of this is when I was attending a dinner held by *the I Love U Guys* foundation one night after the conference and I was sitting at the head table with its board members: when one of them asked me where I was visiting from and I told her Scotland, she began to cry and thanked me for travelling such a distance to work on this issue. It is important to note, however, that I do not think this impaired my ability to be critical, as I feel I was still able to note where the existing weaknesses were in emergency communication and management; plus, my analyses of *YouTube* comments gave me an insight into how vulnerable some users feel and their lack of faith in the ability of law enforcement to protect them. Evincing those weaknesses and doubts should hopefully contribute to further improvements in future.

When I returned from the symposium, I transcribed and coded material from presentations. There were a multitude of speakers there (experts in threat assessment, survivors from school shootings, academics specialising in bullying prevention, an organisation which aids survivors; see http://thebriefings.org/for further information); however, I only transcribed the presentations that I felt were particularly relevant to my study: John Michael Keyes, director and co-founder of the *I Love U Guys Foundation*; John McDonald, executive director of emergency management, *Jefferson County School District*; Sergeant AJ DeAndrea, SWAT team leader, *Arvada Police Department*.

Further, my coding of the material was informed by pre-existing codes for the Columbine and Virginia policy samples. Once again, I analysed the materials to extrapolate key themes from them, falling into the same categories: 'Security and Safety' and 'Bureaucratic Procedures.' This was further supplemented with some background reading about individual presenters, the organisation to which they were affiliated, and the model or product they were discussing. When I use material from the 'Symposium' in later data analysis chapters, I will use direct quotations and paraphrasing from statements speakers made in their presentations or in question and answer sessions afterwards; these will be accompanied by their name and affiliation.

4.5.2 School Safety Interviews

Another fruitful aspect of the 'School Safety Symposium' was it gave me some useful contacts. One such example was John McDonald, executive director of emergency management for *Jefferson County Schools.* From the conference, I knew he had experience of working in law enforcement and alongside them conducting emergency management for national events like the Olympics, and Democratic and Republican Conventions and consulting for the *FBI.*

I contacted him via email —these were provided to all attendees at the conference — informing him about my study and what participating would entail. The following email then questioned him about the thematic areas that were emerging from my *YouTube* analyses with regards to a lack of trust and faith in law enforcement. Adhering to the conventions of an interview, he replied to the questions I had via email.[46] The benefit of this approach was the suitability and flexibility for the interviewee. The downfalls were the lack of real-time prompting, building rapport, and probing that other types of interviews generally involve. I also contacted him in this way at a later date to ask about emergency management plans after the Columbine shooting. Furthermore, as he wishes to be named in this study, following the interview, I sent to him the quotes being used to allow him check them; he replied confirming that the quotes attributed to him are fine.

Furthermore, another contact made at the 'Symposium' allowed me to set up a face-to-face interview with a representative from the mobile phone safety app *LiveSafe*. This took place in the second stage of my fieldwork and lasted about an hour. From the interview, I found out more about the uses of the app, the practicalities of implementing it, and the organisation's plans for the future. This allowed me to document how emergency communication procedures — and mobile phone technologies — have evolved since the Virginia Tech shooting.

The representative to whom I spoke wanted *LiveSafe* to be mentioned, but did not state a preference for being named themselves; therefore, by default, they were anonymised and are referred to as a 'representative' or 'spokesperson' throughout this thesis. Once again, I kept them informed about the developments of the thesis and sent them the interview transcript, adhering to the ethical dimensions discussed previously.

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[46] This seemed to be the preferred method for him. I inquired about possibly speaking on the telephone or Skype but he did not reply to this even after two prompts. Possibly email was the most flexible option for him because the questions can be answered using a smartphone whilst travelling to work if using public transport or during a break at work; hence, no prefixed time has to be arranged and the interviewee can reply when it suits them.

4.5.3. Recruitment of Gun-Related Interviews

In the previous chapter, I outlined how potential interviewees were identified and the sample used. To recruit those participants in the early autumn of 2012, I contacted them either via the publicly available email addresses or contact forms provided on their website.[47] This method to recruit them was not invasive and did not put them on the spot like cold-calling them on the telephone might do.

As it transpired, some groups did not respond to my initial email, which I usually re-sent after a couple of weeks as a further prompter; if there was no contact after the third attempt (including the initial one), I let the matter drop to avoid harassing people. A number of groups did express an informal interest but when I sent on the consent form they did not reply, despite further prompts from me. One such group was *Students for Concealed Carry*. Although I wanted to limit my sample to those groups specialising in gun violence prevention rather than gun rights, I thought the focus on the issue of concealed carry on campus in chapter nine meant that it would have been fruitful to speak to the interest group that arose from that movement. The fact that I was unable to get that group to speak to me is a weakness of this study and something which I hope to address in future research. Once a group had replied to me expressing interest, I sent them an information sheet providing more details about the study and what their role would involve. Following that, interviewees who were still interested were sent a consent form to read and sign before a date and time for an interview was set up.

Of particular noteworthiness was my recruitment of interviewees Pete Brodnitz, *BSG*, and Jim Kessler, *TW*. In November 2012, I attended a 'U.S. Election Campaign' talk held at the *University of Glasgow*, where Pete Brodnitz was answering questions. After the presentation, I approached Pete Brodnitz to ask him some questions about the issue of gun reform in the aftermath of the 2012 election results. I did not ask him about an interview in person to avoid putting him on the spot — particularly since other attendees had also approached him to ask questions — and instead that evening sent him an email inquiring whether he would be willing to be interviewed listing the key topic areas I wanted to

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[47] I found that the latter method of communication was not as effective as directly emailing people. For instance, when on the website of one GVP group there was a form with predefined categories such as 'donations,' 'interest in getting involved' and so forth; since my query did not match any of these, I had to select 'other,' meaning it might not go to the right person. This could have been a reason why I did not hear back from this group at all in my attempts to recruit a research participant there.

discuss. He replied stating a willingness to help but, at that moment, the consulting organisation he worked for, *Benenson Strategy Group*, was not focusing on helping political actors with gun-related matters. What Pete Brodnitz did, instead, was speak to his former colleague Jim Kessler at *Third Way*, explaining about the interview and my study. Since Jim Kessler agreed to participate, Pete Brodnitz sent me Jim's email address, which is not publicly available on the *Third Way* website. Based on this preliminary interest, I went through the usual process of recruitment with Jim Kessler, sending him an information sheet and consent form. Pete Brodnitz ended up being recruited too, but I explain about this in the subsection about the second stage of interviews.

In total, eleven gun-related interviews were conducted, some of which were conducted with the same people in different stages. The interviewing took place in two stages: the first was in autumn 2012, prior to the election results; the second stage took place in the summer 2013 to monitor changes that were taking place in the aftermath of the *Sandy Hook* shooting (December 2012).

4.5.4. First Stage of Interviews: Skype and Telephone

Given the fact that the interest group interviewees are based in various locations throughout the U.S. — Colorado, the District of Columbia, Maine and Virginia — and I am a self-funded student living in the U.K., it was more economically viable to conduct the interviews by means of telephone, email or Skype, based on interviewees' preferences. Conducted in total in the first stage of interviews (September-December 2012) were five interviews: three on the telephone (*Colorado Ceasefire, Coalition to Stop Gun Violence* and *Third Way*); two via Skype (*Virginia Center for Public Safety* and *States United to Prevent Gun Violence*). These generally lasted between one to just over two hours. This meant I had to be mindful of the time differences between the U.K. and the U.S., as well as states within the U.S. (Colorado, for instance, being further west, is two hours behind East Coast Time).

I conducted two interviews via Skype and found this method more preferable, because they are closest in nature to a face-to-face interview. The only potential flaw is technical difficulties such as the screen freezing and audio problems, both which I had to resolve during the course of my two Skype interviews. The three telephone interviews I conducted were slightly trickier given face-to-face context was absent. I felt I had to be more

proactive in keeping the interviewee's interest during the telephone call, so I tried to avoid pauses and silences during the calls. An additional pitfall was the interviewees sometimes struggled to understand my Scottish accent, particularly since some interviewees had never heard one before. I deliberately spoke slower than usual and avoided Scottish colloquialisms.

These interviews were all semi-structured in nature: there was a predefined topic guide of word or phrases to facilitate discussion, as well as specific questions for each organisation; however, there was enough flexibility to allow interviewees to 'stray' from the topic guide on occasions where they were providing information relevant to the research questions (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 96-97). Since the validity of a semi-structured interview is partly dependent on its topic guide, it was important to have a set of topics and questions that would fully answer the research questions of this thesis (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 8-9) — copies of my interview topic guides are available on request. Additional information about the on-going work of these groups was shared via email and is also included in my analysis.

4.5.5. Second Stage of Interviews

After the first stage of interviews, I was satisfied that I had gained insight into the thoughts of interest groups; although I was slightly concerned about *timeliness* in that by the time my thesis was written up and submitted in 2014, some of the material spoken about in 2012 interviews would now be out-dated given this is an ever-evolving issue. As discussed in chapter one, the shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school (December 2012) changed the political landscape for gun reform, as the Obama administration began to put together proposals and gun violence started to gain traction as an issue of public concern. Particularly illustrative of this change was *BSG*'s Pete Brodnitz sending me an email in January 2013, saying since the issue of gun reform was more salient than it had been in November 2012 when we first made contact, he now wished to speak to me about the topics I had initially sent him. I responded to this with the intention to set up an interview. Concurrently, I also contacted my five original interviewees to inform them of my intended finish date of summer 2014 and requested another interview to document changes in the

wake of Sandy Hook. I intended to once again use Skype and the telephone to conduct interviews and to do so in the summer/autumn of 2013 to leave time for changes to occur but also leaving me enough time to write up my findings.

In early 2013, I applied for a 'Saltire PGR Outward Mobility Travel Grant' provided to the *University of Glasgow* by the Scottish Government, which offered funds of up to four thousand pounds for postgraduate students to conduct international research. In April 2013, I discovered my application had been successful for a travel grant and would be awarded up to four thousand pounds to conduct research in the U.S.. I contacted my five original research participants and political pollster, Pete Brodnitz, to inform them of my plans to travel. I called them on the telephone so I could address any immediate concerns/queries they may have, but there was no pressure was put on them to respond —I told them to think about it before giving a definitive answer. In the end, they all agreed to me visiting, except the interviewees from *SUPGV* who is based in Maine*:* she said it would not be relevant to her group since it is a collection of state groups and suggested speaking via Skype again.

My travel to the U.S. was two-fold in nature split between Colorado and the East Coast (District of Columbia and Virginia). Once I found out about the 'School Safety Symposium' held at *Columbine High* discussed earlier in June 2013, I decided to visit Colorado then and speak to my *CC* interviewee whilst there and then visit the other states in September 2013 when all interviewees were available. Retrospectively, I think dividing up the trip into two segments worked out better than travelling from Colorado to the East Coast. First of all, the travelling was exhausting, in particular the journey to Colorado which took over twenty-four hours. Secondly, it allowed me to process the intense experience of the Colorado trip and write up my findings, before carrying out the final stage of fieldwork in Washington, D.C. and Virginia.

Whilst in Colorado for the duration of six days[48], I re-interviewed my interviewee from *CC* and attended a group meeting to gain an insight into the landmark gun laws implemented in Colorado in 2013 (to be discussed in later data analysis chapters), so the second stage of interviewing felt particularly relevant here.

The second trip to Washington, D.C. and Virginia[49] lasting ten days took place in early

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[48] A number of these were spent at the 'School Safety Symposium' at Columbine High discussed in an earlier subsection.
[49] I spent most of my time in the District of Columbia but travelled to Virginia by train to interview one participant.

September 2013. The day before I was to travel there was a mass shooting incident at the Naval Yard in Washington, D.C. Consequently, my interviewees generally used the latest mass shooting to make a case for changing current gun laws, since the Navy Yard shooter was able to legally procure weapons despite a history of mental illness. In total, I conducted three gun-related interviews in Washington, D.C. and one in Virginia.

Notably, I have an anecdote about an interview I *intended* to conduct in Washington, D.C. Through one of my current interviewees, I made contact with a leading gun violence prevention group with offices in Washington, D.C. and arranged an interview with them. When I arrived, I found their office was closed off and I required the security guard to grant me access. Once there, I was told by their communications director that the interview needed to be approved by their board of directors before it could take place; I gave them an information sheet, a topic guide and consent form, and let them know I would still be in Washington, D.C. for a few more days. As it worked out, this interviewee did not contact me until I was back in Scotland, so we ended up speaking on the telephone.[50] They also requested complete anonymity, so they will now be referred to as a 'representative from a leading GVP group.' On returning to the UK, I also re-interviewed my *SUPGV* contact on the telephone.

Overall, I conducted seven gun-related interviews in the second stage of fieldwork, two of which were on the telephone (the example discussed above and the *SUPGV* interviewee). I found that the five face-to-face gun-related interviews were a definite improvement on the first stage Skype and telephone ones, with regards to better rapport (likely based on the eye contact and body language that is absent in telephone calls; see Bloor and Wood 2006) and interviewees being able to understand my accent a bit better. The interviewees who were a bit distant and abrupt on the telephone in the first stage, by contrast, were really friendly and talkative when I met them in person.

What I was generally concerned about before conducting interviews was given I am from the UK, interviewees might think: 1) I do not know about their history of gun laws; 2) I believe the U.S. system of gun ownership should mirror the UK's tight restrictions. I negated the first issue by doing extensive reading about the history and current developments of U.S. gun laws. Developing this knowledge was very useful in allowing me to pursue topics that perhaps were not on the list of interview topics but turned out to be relevant. The second issue arose to some extent when interviewees remarked 'there was so little gun violence where I was from' and asked about UK gun laws. I gave them a brief

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[50] I got the feeling that this group wanted to prepare responses to the questions I had, as the responses felt very closed off and 'sound bite' in nature. The interview as a whole did not have the same flexibility as all my other ones did.

outline of those laws and how mass shootings have been pivotal to motivating change in the U.K.; but informed them that I did not think the U.S. should be like the U.K. because both have different histories and cultures. Further, in reflexivity terms, it could be said that my distance from the U.S. was beneficial, because I do not have the attachment to a particular viewpoint that a U.S. researcher who has grown up there might have.

4.5.6. Mayors Against Illegal Guns Event

During my visit to Washington, D.C., there was a presentation outside the Capitol by the political action committee *Mayors Against Illegal Guns* as part of their 'No More Names' bus tour: this involved the group travelling around the U.S. giving presentations focusing on the victims of gun violence since Sandy Hook by counting the total number of deaths and reading out the names of the latest victims. At the event (see figure 11 below) — which was filmed by several media representatives — there were speakers (relatives of those killed or survivors) from high-profile mass shootings: Tuscon, Arizona (2011), Aurora, Colorado (2012) and Sandy Hook, Connecticut (2012).[51]

Figure 11: *MAIG* Event outside Capitol, Washington, D.C.[52]

Once again, this event was very emotional. A young girl whose sister was a teacher

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[51] I was rather surprised that there were no speakers representing Columbine or Virginia Tech. An explanation for this could be all the speakers were from more recent events, which are likely to be salient in people's minds.
[52] This image was taken from: *No More Names* (2013) 'Rally at the U.S. Capitol,' 23 September. *http://nomorenames.org/blog/2013/09/rally-at-the-u-s-capitol/?source=.*

killed during the Sandy Hook school gave a particularly emotional and tearful speech. The girl also described her sister's bullet wounds, which was very disturbing. Out of all the relatives of victims I have heard speak, probably this young girl's presentation was the most upsetting. Despite this, I felt that my own life experiences and personality traits equipped me to deal with the emotional dimensions of the research, as did discussing my experiences with fellow PhD students.

4.5.7. Analysing Interviews

All the face-to-face, Skype and telephone interviews were all recorded on audio-equipment, thus keeping a permanent record of the interview (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 112). By transcribing audio-recordings I 'froze' the 'captured' spoken discourse of the interviews (Bloor and Wood, 2006: 166). A *verbatim* transcript is said to be an accurate reproduction of the *aural record* of the interview if regularly checked transcripts for quality and to rectify any errors; it must also be acknowledged, however, that the transcription is only a 'partial account' of the interview itself, which is an interactive, interpretative activity (Poland, 1995/1999: 14, 29). The only exception to this was the email interview conducted with John McDonald, which simply required me to print out the emails.

The interview transcripts were analysed using a process of 'open coding' where similar fragments of data were grouped together into categories and assigned codes serving as descriptors of the meaning. The pre-defined topic areas in the interview schedule facilitating the broad groupings of data. In the case of the gun-related interviews, the following main categories were generated: concealed carry and gun free zones; laws and key concerns, organisation; political actors; public and gun control. The *LiveSafe* and John McDonald interviews categorisation was based on emerging themes relating to law enforcement, vulnerability, fear and managing risk, emergency management, and emergency communication. To code interviews, I followed the process recommended by Boeijjie (2010: 96-98): read the document and re-read each line to categorise data into fragments; determine relevance to the research questions; formulate code labels for each fragment and compare and contrast these. The initial stage of coding involved me jotting down ideas on the hard copy of transcripts and then creating a mind-map of themes for each interview; in the groupings of gun-related and school safety interviews, there were

some overlaps and distinctive themes. I used these mind-maps to create my *NVivo* coding schemes; I thereafter coded each interview and allocated results accordingly. This initial process then led onto axial coding checks, i.e. whether any categories need to be merged or if any new codes are needed; therefore, the purpose of axial coding is to ascertain the usefulness of the categories and codes produced by the earlier 'open-coding' process (Boeijjie, 2010: 108). In this case, the secondary analyses via mind-maps and *NVivo* generated the final 'axial' coding schemes for the gun and school safety-related interview (these are available on request).

In order to aid the process of coding, I used the computer program *NVivo* (version 9, 2012), allowing the user to create 'nodes' (analytical categories) during the process of analysis and idea formation (Gibbs, 2004: 307). Computer programs allow for large amounts of data to be processed in less time than it would take a human to manually do it (Krippendorff, 2004: 257). Analysing data using computer programs can reduce the number of mistakes made as "computers are deterministic machines [thus meaning] they cannot **not** process text reliably" (original emphasis) (Krippendorff, 2004: 259). I generally found that *NVivo* was most useful for organising categories and then allowing me to view these at a glance[53]. It is, therefore, as Tesch (1991: 25-26) says: "The computer does not make conceptual decisions, such as which words or themes are important to focus on, or which analytic step to take next."

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[53] I did not pay heed to the percentages of data coded. I do not think that the fact that, for instance, 15% of a particular node was coded in one source is particularly indicative of anything. I feel it was far better to use *NVivo* to organise data into codes and sub-codes, using an approach guided by theory and research objectives.

PART TWO: FEAR AND MANAGING RISK

5. Constructions and Reactions of Risk, Fear and Terror

Introduction

This chapter unpacks the development of a climate of fear in the aftermath of the two shooting incidents. In an event that most people would not have experienced — in this case, school shootings — the media becomes the primary source for learning about risk (Muschert 2013). The exploration of this is taken even further, looking at how school shootings are depicted as a pattern and how this feeds into people's perceptions. Assessed here were Cohen's (1972/2002) facets of the media and moral panic relationship: exaggerated and disproportionate levels of threat; predicting the event which occurred will happen again in future; the 'symbolization' of the threat.

The findings for this chapter come from: news media samples for Columbine (1999-2004, 2009) and Virginia Tech (2007-2012); letters to the editor shortly after events (April/May 1999 and 2007 respectively); and comments posted June 2012 to June 2013 on *YouTube* videos about both shootings. Appropriately, the theoretical foundations for this chapter are located within the concepts of fear (Skogan 1993; Tudor 2003), risk (Gardner 2008; Sunstein 2005; Wahlberg and Sjoberg 2000) and a 'culture of fear' (Altheide 1997, 2002b, 2009; Bauman 2006; Furedi 2007, 2008; Glassner 1999, 2004); as well as 'fear of crime' (Gabriel and Greve 2003; Gray *et al.* 2011; Hollway and Jefferson 1997, 2000; Jackson 2004, 2009; Jackson and Gray 2010; Lee 2007) and moral panic (Cohen 2011; Klocke and Muschert 2010; McRobbie and Thornton 1995) literature. A more detailed overview of the theoretical framework and research process employed to explore the 'culture of fear' is provided in chapters two and four respectively.

This chapter will go through the reactions to school shootings as they relate to a distorted level of threat (as per Cohen's (1972) original model), laying the foundations for fears around this particular type of crime to develop. Several theorists (Hollway and Jefferson 1997; Lee 2007) have contended that 'risk' and 'fear' are interlinked; without measuring levels of risk, 'fear of crime' is thus said to be a redundant concept (Lee, 2007:

120). Risk perceptions are judgments about potential threats and hazards (Slovic, 1987: 236).[54] Utilised in this thesis is a conceptual structure provided by Kaperson and Kaperson (1996) for analysing assessments of risk: the extent to which content is sensationalised, interpretations of risk, and symbolic connotations in the depiction and characterisation of risk. Petts *et al.* (2001) advanced this model through further survey and focus group research and found that different risk issues, such as train accidents, have specific 'risk signatures' denoting understandings to the lay public. It has been said there is a gap in current moral panic literature with regards to risk needing to be filled (Critcher 2011).

Researchers like Kupchik and Bracy (2009), Mueller and Lawrence (2003), and Killingbeck (2001) have examined the extent to which the news media distort the risk of school crime and violence and their confirmed hypotheses were that news stories exaggerate the risk of victimisation to students; this risk is portrayed as widespread rather than confined to a particular area. Initially, my findings seemed to slightly contradict this with the thematic code 'rarity' in both news media samples, serving to remind readers that school shootings are sporadic events. For reasons that will explored later on in this chapter, however, the conclusion was reached that the 'rarity' theme was unlikely to negate the distorted levels of risk also portrayed in the news media. My findings, therefore, bring about similar conclusions to previous studies.

This thesis discovered news media content portrayed school shootings as an epidemic. Glassner (2004: 823) described 'normalisation' as the mechanism through which the culture of fear is achieved through repetition and labelling sporadic incidents as trends. This also relates to the 'prediction' component of moral panics, implying this event has become so 'commonplace' that there is an expectation it will occur again (Cohen 1972/2002). Throughout my analyses, the 'problem frame' — a discourse of fear with the awareness and expectation of danger and risk (Altheide, 1997: 648) — acted as a theoretical lens through which to view the beginnings of a climate of fear developing.

I set out to question how fear is constructed through symbolical processes in news media coverage (Critcher 2011) and thereafter exemplified in letters and *YouTube* debates. A starting point for this was examining how people feel and respond to threats both individually and collectively (Elias 1982; Furedi 2007); and how this is then translated into 'cultural scripts' (Garland 2001), which are meanings embodying understandings of crime and appropriate levels of fear and anxiety. The approach taken is that discourse acts as a persuasive tool in the struggle for power (Garland 1985). Complicating matters is the

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[54] Although Slovic focuses on technology and chemical/nuclear hazards, his arguments may be adapted to 'risk' more generally.

argument that certain discourses can become so normalised and routine that people are not even aware of them (Mayr and Machin, 2012: 10) — this is the embodiment of Lukes' (2005) third dimension of power, where the ultimate exercise of power is said to be securing their compliance by influencing their beliefs. In the case of my research, the term 'school shooting' evokes a series of emotions and meanings. This thesis sought to update this viewpoint by considering whether online debates, as argued by Mythen (2010), offer alternative viewpoints to the themes promoted in the mainstream media, as well as considering if the internet is a forum allowing for a fuller consideration of potential threats and changing the way moral panics develop (as theorised by McRobbie and Thornton 1995). What I intend to do here is examine whether such meanings *overpower* and/or are *overpowered* by counteractive themes of 'lack of fear' and 'reassurances' present in news media and letters, as well as any counter-discourses circulating in *YouTube* discussions.

The roadmap of this chapter will discuss the following issues: the portrayal of school shootings as an 'on-going trend,' i.e. a constant and frequently recurring problem; the benchmark statuses of the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings within the wider debate of school shootings and how this is predicated on the death toll; the 'normalisation' of such incidents making them seem as though they *will* occur again in future; the steady presence of trepidation in letters and *YouTube* comments in the Columbine sample, contrasted with the marginal 'fear of future attack' frame in the Virginia Tech samples; the 'associated terror' of the Columbine and Virginia Tech attacks evident in both news accounts and *YouTube* discussions; the counteractive forces of the 'rarity,' 'reassurances' and 'lack of fear' codes intended to reduce anxieties. This chapter will finish off with a discussion of the elements above, outlining how these create the foundations for a culture of fear to develop. The theoretical dimensions of each theme will be outlined and a sample of the most illustrative quotes/examples from news media, letters and *YouTube* material[55] will be used to showcase them.

5.1 Reshaping Risk Perceptions

This section looks at the distorted threat of school shooting incidents occurring. Slovic (1987: 236) speaks of the 'signal potential' of unexpected and devastating events to distort risk. It was found that news media content tended to present school shootings as part of an

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[55] Direct quotations will be taken from news media and letter material only.

'on-going trend,' hence promoting the threat of a school shooting as imminent; whilst the names of school shooting incidents were immortalised. This allowed for the 'normalisation' of school shootings, as evidenced in letters and *YouTube* comments.

5.1.1 Infamy of Columbine and Virginia Tech

Research conducted by Petts *et al.* (2001) found that risk events have specific 'risk signatures' containing understandings for the lay public. The 'risk signatures' for the two case studies have become so immortalised that they are commonly referred in a number of feature articles and letters just by the location (Littleton and Blacksburg respectively) itself or sometimes by more descriptive signifiers 'Littleton incident' and 'Blackburg tragedy,' and the date when they occurred (4/20 and 4/16 respectively, listing dates in month-day format). There were multiple references to 'post-Columbine' and 'post 4/16,' denoting a specific period in time when things changed — much like 'post-9/11' to refer to a world after September 11th. In the local paper *The Roanoke Times* (April 2007), the Virginia Tech massacre was referred to as "Our own 9/11" for the tragic impact it has had on that community. One aspect of this naturalisation is 'Columbine' becoming a standalone term on its own, containing a complexity of meanings:

> "It came to refer to not only school shootings, but also youth
> problems, discipline concerns at schools, and even lax school
> and governmental oversight and policies concerned with
> protecting children" (Altheide, 2009: 1358).

Another article (*TIME* November 2000) identified Columbine as achieving a certain magnitude of death and destruction: "A really 'big' story, a double-digit disaster on the scale of Columbine." The term 'Columbine' itself became a shorthand term for the epitome of how shocking and horrific a school shooting can be: "This was no Columbine"; "We've got a Columbine incident going on in the place"; "Germany's Columbine; "'more Columbines probable"; "Columbine-like school violence." Moreover, 'Littleton,' as the place synonymous with Columbine, is also occasionally used to refer specifically to school

shootings: "there will be more Littletons"; "A bitter kid with a gun is, too often, Littleton." The incorporation of the term 'Columbine' and, to a lesser extent, 'Littleton' into the lexicon represents mass tragedy and a particular type of violence.

Markedly, one feature writer (*TIME* November 1999) surmised that "a second Columbine might garner only half the shrill media attention lavished on the first," presumably because the shock of the first time has dissipated. This is actually a good point when considering the Virginia Tech shooting did not have the same impact: the shorthand 'Virginia Tech' or even just 'Blacksburg' never came to represent a horrifying scenario on a campus. Looking at the letters sample and articles on Virginia Tech compared to Columbine sample shows the former is considerably smaller in size and people did not display the same level of anger, indignation and shock. Similarly, 'Virginia Tech' is a 'buzzword' for the 'worst' gun massacre ever (to be discussed momentarily), but it does not appear to represent school shootings in the same way Columbine does — probably a result of Columbine involving children and being the most horrific one to have occurred at that period in time; when Virginia Tech occurred, by contrast, it would most likely not have been as 'shocking.'

Overall, it could be said these two shootings are 'mega-killings': symbolic and powerful events that are used as a comparative scale for other stories in the news media (Peelo, 2006: 161-162). Comparisons of Columbine and Virginia Tech with each other and other school shootings act as a form of 'priming' — digestible forms of information to aid understandings of other events (Altheide, 1997: 650) — for people to contextualise each incident. In the time period between Columbine and Virginia Tech, school shootings were commonly referred to in news content as the 'worst since Columbine,' with 'since' indicating Columbine is a benchmark allowing for comparisons with other school shootings. The point was made that the constant comparisons to Columbine "help perpetuate fear by reminding readers of the tragedy" (Kupchik and Bracy, 2009: 149). At that moment in time it seems Columbine was generally considered the most horrific of the incidents; although there had been school shootings in the past that had, arguably, been equally as shocking: for instance, Westside Middle School (1998) which involved two pre-teenage perpetrators. Probably the real difference with Columbine was the live unfolding of events on television, as children ran from the school crying and some covered in blood and the SWAT team tried to hunt down the perpetrators. Also, the shooters in the Columbine case killed themselves before law enforcement could reach them (unlike the Westside perpetrators), which left a lot of questions to be answered. Notably, Virginia Tech was compared with school shootings less often than Columbine, but was generally

used as the benchmark of comparison, e.g. 'the school shooting was the worst *since* the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre' (emphasis added) (*TIME* 2012).

Another way of doing this is constant reminders of the severity of the shooting. The phrase 'the worst school shooting in U.S. history' — or some variant of it such as 'deadliest school massacre' — was used fifty-six times in the entire news media population collected (refer back to chapter three) to refer to the Columbine shooting. The Virginia Tech incident eclipsed Columbine's death toll with thirty-two murders and the suicide of the perpetrator, which was also the highest rate of any mass shooting in the U.S. There were twenty-one references to it as the 'nation's worst school [or campus] massacre'; however, this was described as being the 'worst mass shooting in U.S. history' — allowing for some deviation on terms like 'bloodbath' and 'gun rampage' — fifty-nine times throughout the Virginia Tech news media sample: this is quite a lot considering there were far more articles in the potential Columbine sample.

Something which imbues infamy to school shootings is the death toll. *YouTube* debates revealed a new and rather surprising thematic area: the perception that the shootings — in particular Columbine — did not really meet the criteria of a 'massacre' because it 'only' had a small number of deaths: "it's barely a shooting"; "they killed so few"; and "they fired one hundred and eighty-eight rounds, but only killed thirteen."[56] It is highly unlikely that controversial opinions like these would be published in the format of letters to the editor or news media articles which go through editorial processes, showing how the development of new media technologies have changed the parameters of the moral panic (McRobbie and Thornton 1995). What this demonstrates is that a number of users understand mass shootings in terms of death toll, suggesting a mind-set akin to a video game of trying to get a better 'score' and a depersonalisation of the incident. This further suggests that some people have almost become inured to it — perhaps as a result of the normalisation of such incidents. It must be noted that the contemporary debates are indicative of opinions that have built up over a period of time, so it is possible that all school shootings before and since Columbine — with the Sandy Hook one still being fresh in people's minds at the time when *YouTube* comments were posted (June 2012-2013) — have resulted in the development of opinions like these. A potential problem arising is that those admiring school shooters may have the mind-set that 'eclipsing' the highest record of deaths currently held by the Virginia Tech shooter is a way to guarantee infamy for them.

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[56] Even though they are represented in quotation marks, *YouTube* comments have been changed slightly to protect the identity of users but preserve the meaning of the original statement. Also, the grammatical errors and spelling mistakes of the original comments have been corrected so they read better.

5.1.2 On-going Trend

Analysing the full news media sample found that the plural form 'school shootings' was used in almost every news report on Columbine, Virginia Tech, and other school shootings during the period from which the news media sample was selected. A subtitle to a *Newsweek* article (December 2011) evocatively states "The bloodshed isn't stopping." The term 'bloodshed' here is an effective way to convey this horror as opposed to just saying 'rising death rates.' The terminology describing school shootings circumscribed them as an on-going trend:

 "It was a sickeningly familiar scene."
"After enduring yet another school shooting."
"Once again a routine school day was interrupted by blasts of gunfire."
"We've been here before, and it's never pretty."

The main lexical technique here is intonation (Parlmer 1976/1981), with the terms 'sickeningly familiar,' 'yet another,' 'once again' and 'been here before' implying weariness at another school shooting. An additional technique was to position school shootings as one in a series of incidents: "apparent epidemic of violence in the classroom"; "the latest schoolhouse slaughter"; "an alarming pattern"; "chilling string" "another American nightmare"; "the killing never stops"; "all-too-common phenomenon of kids killing kids in American schools"; "more blood was spilled." Fear-inducing terminology, such as 'chilling,' 'alarming,' 'nightmare,' 'blood spilled,' 'killing,' 'epidemic' 'slaughter' is utilised here to convey this trend as something which affects many people a la the 'problem frame' (Altheide, 1997: 655). These value-laden terms and recurring frames (Klocke and Muschert, 2010: 16) allow for the fulfilment of the 'symbolisation' facet of moral panics (Cohen 1972/2002), where the symbolic words associated with murder are encompassed with the status as a pattern.

To 'cultivate' the socio-historical conditions signalling to the presence of a problem (Klocke and Muschert, 2010: 14), as well as to emphasise the important news values of

cultural resonance and proximity, feature articles used aggregations of those killed by school/mass shootings in the United States. This finding also paralleled Wondemaghen's (2013), which found that past incidents of school shootings were used to contextualise the most recent one. This is a feature of the 'problem frame,' which invokes a temporal-spatial relation ('near' and 'now') to make it relevant to the media audience (Altheide, 1997: 655). A selection of *Newsweek* headlines around the time of the Virginia Tech shooting — when the issue would be salient in readers' minds — positioned multiple-victim murders as an epidemic specific to the U.S.: 'America's Mass Murder Addiction'; 'Latest round of mass killings'; and 'Worse Than the War.' Putting it into a context designed to be shocking, news media articles across the samples aggregated the number of killings occurring in the U.S. over a specific time period: "54 innocents dead in nine shootings over the past four weeks"; "All these gun killings — 43 in total — occurred over the last 26 days"; "there have been 41 school shootings in the U.S. since 1996, taking 110 lives." The listing of these figures serves to locate youth violence under the 'problem frame' (see Altheide 1997), promoting feelings of danger and risk to encourage action. Although figures provide the toll of mass killings in a digestible form, the 'fear' is tied up in the terminology used, fulfilling the requirements of melodrama and exaggeration for the development of a moral panic (Cohen 1972/2002).

Another approach common throughout the news media samples was taking a record of past school shootings in list format, with an overview of each incident, where it occurred, the perpetrator(s) and the death toll. Portraying it as a trend also satisfies the moral panic factor of 'prediction,' implying that the event will occur again (Cohen 1972/2002) and the 'problem frame' component of it. It also leaves a 'symbolic legacy,' where aspects of it can be incorporated into future moral panics (Klocke and Muschert, 2010: 17).

Looking at letters to the editors published immediately after Columbine indicates that readers also feel school shootings are a commonplace occurrence:

> "...the many school-related acts of gun violence." (*TIME*, May 1999)
> "This phenomenon is becoming so widespread." (*New York Times*, April 1999)
> "This recent school shooting is yet another manifestation." (*Denver Post*, April 1999)

The phrase 'Many school-related acts of gun violence' in the first letter shows the writer sees it as a common occurrence — particularly relevant since it is written by a student in middle school. The second letter alludes to the increase in school shootings. Likewise, in the final letter, the term 'recent school shooting' indicates it is one in a series and the adverb 'yet' coupled with the adjective 'another' implies there have been other incidents. After the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting, similarly, *YouTube* users in both the Columbine and Virginia Tech samples questioned why "It has happened again" and why "It always happens in the U.S," showing it is perceived as an on-going trend and one which is U.S-centric. This paved the ways for discussions on ways to resolve the issue to take place (Klocke and Muschert 2010).

Further exacerbating the feeling of an 'on-going trend' was the number of copycat threats and attacks, particularly after Columbine. News media content denoted an overwhelming number of threats with the use of verbs like 'waves' and 'ricocheted.' A *Washington Post* (May 1999) headline read "Schools Scramble to Respond to Violent Threats since Littleton,' implying that schools are struggling to deal with the number of copycat threats. An excerpt from a different *Washington Post* article (April 1999) read:

> "Rumors are still swirling through local schools. There's a
> bomb at Potomac High School. Maybe Stonewall Jackson.
> It'll go off Thursday. Or Friday. Someone is after the jocks.
> The blacks. The "rednecks.""

The technique here is intonation (Parlmer 1976/1981), representing speech, where the fast rhythm conveys a sense of panic at the threats, in particular their varying and uncertain natures. Other articles aggregate the toll of the problem by listing the frequency and nature of threats. In some news articles, a brief overview is given in list format details of the copycat plan foiled: who the attack planners were, where it occurred, and the intended targets if applicable. The coverage of copycat attacks is saturated in the news media samples up to a month later, exemplifying the feeling that the copycat threats are directly a result of the shooting at Columbine High.[57]

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[57] There were only two direct mentions in the entire Virginia Tech news sample of copycat attacks having being inspired by this particular incident. More problematically, copycat threats at this time could be related

To that end, a poll conducted by *Newsweek* (2000) found that 88% of those polled — the sample size is not provided in article — believed media coverage leads to copycat school shootings. A number of *YouTube* debaters also showed disgust at the news media for immortalising school shooters; one user even stated on a Columbine video "Want to become famous? The media is waiting." Another contributor on a Columbine video made the point "I know all about the gunmen [of Columbine, Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook] but nothing about who the victims were," which is a tragic legacy for those murdered. Similarly, those praising the shooters said their mark will be left long after their death and that they desire that type of infamy.

The counterargument could be made that the detailed information about perpetrators and copycat plots could equip the public with knowledge about potential warning signs, so this is a tricky area to navigate. I feel that the main problem contributing to a climate of fear lies not with what information is included per se, but with the sensationalised terminology used, and setting a bar on the 'deadliest school shooting' as covered in the previous sub-section.

5.1.3 Normalisation

The emergent code 'normalisation' is evident when people accept that these incidents *will* occur again and that every school is vulnerable. This is potentially the frame most conducive to the development of a culture of fear, since this has been linked to the need to anticipate threats of something untoward or dangerous happening (Furedi, 1997; Jackson 2004, 2009; Jackson and Gray 2010; Warr 2000). When a disproportionate level of risk becomes engrained in society, it can led to over-reactions and hence unnecessarily restrict people's behaviour (Gardner, 2008: 131; Sunstein, 2005: 37). This is the final stage of a 'moral panic,' where the threat is normalised leaving the legacy of living with the event (Klocke and Muschert, 2010: 11).

Through its use of language, news media content 'normalised' school shootings. For instance, after a post-Columbine school shooting, a *TIME* article (May 2001) summarised the extent of the problem: "'It's only me,' said the boy with the gun...If only that were true." The second part of the excerpt is quite colloquial in nature, giving the statement an

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to the eighth anniversary of the Columbine attack (falling four days later), so it is difficult to ascertain any connections.

informal feel as though it is part of everyday conversation (for further information, see Mayr and Machin 2012) — the use of this language technique is to normalise what is being said. A feature article (*Newsweek* October1999) trying to encourage gun reform stated: "Be warned. That next school may be the one your children attend; the next accident could be close to home." The adverb 'next' here denotes that another school shooting *will* occur. It intends to invoke fear by implying if readers do not take action on guns, then their own children might be victims of a school attack — this could be quite effective with already-anxious parents worried about their children's safety. Altheide (2002a) points to the symbolic connection between protection and children; perhaps a result of what Warr (2000: 456) calls 'altruistic fear,' where parents' fear lies with what potential harms could occur to their children, purported to be as powerful as concern for individual wellbeing.

A particularly illustrative example of normalisation is the *Richmond Times Dispatch* opinion piece (May 2007) written by the president of *Brady*, the largest gun violence prevention group. The article begins with a fear-inducing title predicting (accurately, as it transpired) that a mass shooting will occur in future: "... And It's Bound to Happen Again." The anonymous perpetrator — serving to further intensify fear levels (see Hollway and Jefferson 1997) — is referred to in pronoun form circumscribing this as a trend: "they're out there, just heartbeats away from going to pieces and pulling the trigger, again and again and again and again until there is bloodshed and death beyond imagining." The persuasive impact of this sentence lies in its claim that future killers are out there and are "just heartbeats away" from pulling the trigger "again and again and again and again" — with this repetition being particular effective at conveying mass shootings and numerous instances of these — and the end result is "bloodshed and death beyond imagining." This opening is clearly designed to denote a perception that 'killers' are lurking. The same article finished with a rather ominous and foreboding ending: "And more will die. Many more." A prediction like this is likely to add to the feeling of trepidation many already have after a school shooting. The fact that this article was written by an interest group member suggested inducing fear was perhaps a means to provoke action on tightening gun restrictions, especially since he finished his article with the call to action: "So – what are we going to do about it?"

A poll conducted by *USA Today/CNN/Gallup* (2000) found that 49% of 1006 adults polled believed that "shootings like the one at Columbine will happen again, regardless of what action government and society take." Likewise, analysing *YouTube* debates and letters to the editor evinced that school shootings have been naturalised to a certain extent. Schoolchildren have the perception that another school shooting will occur and they,

therefore, fall under the rubric of 'potential victims.' Letters written by a fourteen and twelve year olds respectively offer a snapshot into the thoughts of schoolchildren on this issue:

> "...people should be completely aware that this type of
> incident can happen anywhere" (*TIME*, May 1999).

> "I read your article on the shooting in Littleton, Colo. It
> helped me realize it could happen at my school" (*Newsweek*,
> May 1999).

These findings offer a revised take on Furedi's (1997: 101) argument that risk is connected to victimhood: "The consciousness of being 'at risk' readily translates itself into the victim identity." The perceived threat of victimisation is based on personal beliefs about vulnerability, control and consequences if a crime was to occur (Jackson 2004). If this feeling was managed correctly, it could be a 'good moral panic' (Cohen 2011) where the anxiety about the prospect of a school shooting serves to make students more aware and willing to report threats. It is when the 'naturalisation' of school shootings causes children undue worry that it becomes something damaging.

Accordingly, *YouTube* users indicate an expectation that they will occur in future:

> "It will never end."
> "These massacres will always happen."
> "If you play with fire and bully these days, you will create
> the next shooter."
> "I bet there will be another shooting soon."

The language here is 'defeatist' in nature, with people becoming a bit inured to the issue. This can be detrimental, as it can only serve to energize the growth of fear. Kupchik and Bracy (2009: 149) theorised that the news media conveyed the idea that school violence can happen anywhere. There is no way to ascertain completely whether such normalisation

arose independently or whether news media created it. Notably, my findings here suggest that normalisation in media content, as well as saturated coverage of school shootings has fed, over a period of time, into a number of public perceptions about the chances of a school shooting occurring.

5.2 Feelings of Fear and Terror

This section describes the narratives and reactions of fear and terror evident after the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings. The discussion starts off with the fear of a future school shooting that is felt by the groups affected by school shootings: schoolchildren and their parents. Tudor's (2003: 239) macro-sociological approach to analysing fear recognised that is "embedded in a complex of physical, psychological, social and cultural relations," so emotions and culture are intertwined with the 'altruistic fear' (Warr 2000) felt by parents and 'fear of victimisation' (Skogan 1993) experienced by students.

The 'associated terror' frame is the final and most visceral component of the culture of fear. For the news coverage of Columbine and Virginia Tech, a sense of the shootings with the technique of describing the sounds of the shootings is captured with the technique of describing the sounds of the shootings, such as gunfire, screams, and wails. Moreover, the primary source fuelling the 'terror' frame in news media content were wounded and uninjured survivors, the majority of whom were eyewitnesses to some portion of the attacks and thus were able to describe the incident as it unfolded. Mairal (2008: 51, 53) said that intense memories taken from the experiences of survivors aids in producing 'terror.' This led to *YouTube* users taking the positions of survivors and those killed during the shooting, empathising with how terrifying the experience must have been; once again, there was a particular emphasis on the sounds during it. The 'terror' section will go through the news media coverage and *YouTube* comments[58] respectively for each case study.

5.2.1 Fear of Future Attack

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[58] There was nothing coded in letters to the editor under 'associated terror.'

Throughout news media coverage, particularly the Columbine sample, the 'fear of future attack' frame was prominent. Sources in news media reports are important here: schoolchildren and parents were the primary interviewees for this type of reporting. Altheide (1997) calls such stories "tales of fear" captured within a discourse of fear. Quotes throughout the Columbine news media sample document that teenagers are terrified to go to school and plan how they would 'handle' a school shooting situation, and their parents' anxieties at sending them to school. Kupchik and Bracy (2009) had similar findings, concluding that stories relying on parents as sources failed to locate school shootings within the proper social context.

Opinion polls quantify the culture of fear and reflect feelings of alarm and panic (Furedi, 1997, 45; Lee, 2007: 3). Further, Lee (2007: 77) theorised that polling about fear of crime serves to set up a 'feedback loop of fear': results convey that the public are afraid and this is then used by political and legal figures to justify the implementation of policies said to tackle crime. Applying the conceptual model to school shootings finds that aggregation of fear in surveys conveys the idea that there is something to be afraid of it. Those polls conducted immediately after Columbine aggregate levels of fears amongst schoolchildren and the public. Seven in ten of the general public surveyed — sample size or population was not specified — believed a school shooting was likely in their neighbourhood (*TIME* 2001). Amongst teenagers, anxiety was demonstrated in a nationwide online survey with answers to the question posed the week after Columbine "Could one of your classmates be a killer," being 47% 'yes,' 38% 'maybe,' and 14% 'no' of just over four thousand respondents (*Daily News*, April 1999). The fact that almost all the sample thought one of their peers was a killer or at the very least might have the potential to be one demonstrates the feeling of a potential threat consuming schoolchildren at that time.

The fear also extended to the next most relevant group of agents: parents who suffer 'altruistic fear' (Warr 2000), as they dread the thought of their children being involved in a school shooting incident. Frequent throughout news media content in the immediate period following the Columbine shooting, was the documentation of this anxiety: parents not being able to sleep or waking up in cold sweats worrying about their teenagers' safety; mothers of pre-school children being anxious about them even starting school; parents feeling concerned about safety and how to stop potential copycat shooters. These 'tales of fear' (Altheide 1997) were mostly documented in the tabloid *USA Today* and broadsheet *Washington Post.*

Aggregation of parents' fear was documented in a *USA Today/CNN/Gallup* (2000) survey, 40% of the 291 parents with children in K-12 schooling polled were 'much more concerned' about their child's safety after Columbine, whilst 30% were 'somewhat more concerned.' A Gallup national poll of 1073 adults taken the day after Columbine found 55% of those surveyed feared for their children's physical safety at school (Gillespie 1999). This might be explained by the theory that salience is of key importance in causing 'probability blindness,' causing people to overestimate risks (Sunstein 2005). Clearly, when the event was so fresh in people's mind, this was going to cause a temporary spike in concern. Accordingly, the same poll was taken three years later and the figure had fallen to 26%; it then rose to 45% the following year when copycat attacks were prolific on the fourth anniversary of Columbine. It may be inferred from this, therefore, that degrees of fear are time-specific to Columbine and subsequent shootings. When the news coverage becomes less saturated, it seems that the event fades in prominence and fear lessens. Evident here is Wahlberg and Sjoberg's (2000) thesis that without constant reminders of risk events, estimates of the risk will decline. What I would suggest then is that fear *never* goes away: it is stored as a schemata (Entman 1993) that lies dormant as time passes and coverage decreases until the next school shooting occurs, which thereafter reignites the original feelings of fear. This fits with Klocke and Muschert's (2010: 14) theory that aspects of older moral panics 're-circulate' in new ones. In this case, fear is a perpetual cycle for those it most concerns: schoolchildren, parents and educators.

At its most fundamental core, 'fear' is the perception that one is likely to be victimised (Skogan, 1993: 133). For those at school, the sense of fear is likely to be potent, given the "primal fear of death is perhaps the prototype or archetype of all fears" (Bauman, 2006: 52). For instance, two letters to the editor are written by schoolchildren who, after Columbine, are now afraid to go to school:

> "I don't even know if I should be afraid or calm when I walk
> into school anymore. No student should be afraid to go to
> school" (*Washington Post*, May 1999).
> "I used to love going to my school. However, now I am
> afraid to go to school, for I know that things like the shooting
> of students can happen anytime, anywhere" (*TIME*, May
> 1999).

The fact that these sentiments were expressed by teenagers makes them all the more tragic. The final part of the *TIME* letter, stating the writer 'knows' students can be shot 'anytime, anywhere' evinces the normalisation of school shootings with the feeling that they are widespread and imminent. Moreover, these letter-writers were from California and the District of Columbia, showing that fear was not localised to the area surrounding Columbine (Littleton, Colorado).

YouTube debates show that this fear exists fourteen years after the shooting. Many commentators are high school or higher education students using *YouTube* as a virtual meeting place to discuss their apprehensions about an attack occurring. The quotes below are a portion of prominent sentiments expressed in Columbine *YouTube* video comments (*YouTube*, June 2012-2013):

> "I've just started high school and things like this are always
> in my mind."
> "Columbine is why I'm scared to go to school."
> "I start high school in two weeks. I'm too scared to go."
> "After Sandy Hook, I don't want to go to school on
> Monday."
> "I NEVER WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL AGAIN."

The comments are demonstrative of what Bauman (2006: 3) calls 'derivative fear,' which is a mind-set of "being susceptible to danger; a feeling of insecurity and vulnerability." As the fourth comment demonstrates, other highly publicised school shootings re-evoke feelings of trepidation. The last comment uses the lexical technique 'intonation,' (Parlmer 1976/1981) conveying speech with the capital letters suggesting intense emotion. The severe consequences of the crime — which school shootings generally have given the intentions of perpetrators to cause harm — exacerbates the depth of fear experienced (Jackson, 2009: 369; Jackson and Gray, 2010: 15; Skogan, 1993: 135).

With this degree of fear consuming them, commentators discuss precautionary strategies to deal with an attack (see, for example, Gabriel and Greve, 2003; Gray *et al* 2011; Jackson and Gray 2010; Scherer *et al.* 2004). In both sets of videos (*YouTube*, June 2012-2013), some users interpreted their physical environment (Jackson, 2004: 963) to

devise 'survival techniques' in anticipation of a shooting attack:

> "In college, I always sit by a window so I can leave the
> moment anything happens."
>
> "When in the library, I always think about this and look for
> the exit doors."
>
> "I'm always ready to climb out the window and drop down."

These comments, all from different users, show a proactive approach to negate their chances of becoming a victim. The appearance of the word 'always' in all three comments shows that this potential victimisation is constantly on their minds. My results suggest a reconceptualisation of the 'symbolic victim' (Altheide 2002b; Garland 2001), where those within the school environment have the ever-present mind-set that they have the *potential* to become a victim of a school shooting. Appropriately, the 'at risk' concept becomes a fixed attribute of individuals (Furedi 1997, 2008; Gardner 2008; Wahlberg and Sjoberg 2000) and hence part of an identity predicated on an 'acknowledgement of powerlessness' (Furedi, 2008: 656). Children are particularly suited to the symbolic identity of 'victim': "Children, most strikingly, are assumed to be vulnerable... [this] is present as an intrinsic attribute" (Fuerdi, 2007: 7).

The 'fear of future attack' frame was considerably smaller for the Virginia Tech news sample. There were a handful of references to younger children being scared to go to university in future feeling that there would be "killers hiding everywhere." Overall, Virginia Tech did not have a similar impact on higher education students as Columbine did with schoolchildren. This is probably because, at this stage, there had been the more likely threats to them from natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina and terrorist attacks post 9/11.

Correspondingly, there were no letters to the editor in the Virginia Tech sample[59] that exhibited fear of a future attack. By contrast, the *YouTube* sample of Virginia Tech video

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[59] It must be noted, however, that the Virginia Tech letters to the editor sample was considerably smaller at 64, compared to Columbine's 148. Moreover, although my sample of news media sources was quite expansive, it could not cover everything. It is entirely possible, therefore, that letters sent to news media sources *not* included in my sample (refer back to the research sample chapter for details of these) after Virginia Tech expressed fear.

comments (*YouTube*, June 2012-2013) had a handful of comments with this frame: "I am now scared to go to school"; "It's scary. You'd think at school you'd be safe."; "I don't live in fear, but I am aware it could happen." These comments demonstrate trepidation at the prospect of a school shooting and the final one normalises it by the user stating 'it could happen' and explaining that they hug their mother before they go to school. The main conclusion to draw from this frame is a general feeling of helplessness: people feel such an event is inevitable and there will be little chance of defending against an attack. A dual perception of elevated likelihood and a depleted sense of control increase one's sense of 'vulnerability' (Jackson 2009; Jackson and Gray 2010). This goes some way to explaining why the movement to allow students to carry concealed weapons to higher education institutions for self-defence, has gained traction; this will be discussed further in chapter nine.

5.2.2 Associated Terror: Experiences and Empathy

The feeling of terror has its roots in feelings invoked by the prospect of death: "Irreparable … Irremediable … Irreversible … Irrevocable … Beyond recall or remedy … The point of no return … The final … The ultimate … The end of everything."(Bauman, 2006: 29). Although this quotation is dramatised for Bauman's style of writing, there is merit in Bauman's (2006: 51) idea that the prospect of death is the "ultimate primordial fear." Tudor (2003: 241), however, cautioned against viewing 'terror' purely as an innate emotion, as it is also socially constructed: something which is particularly evident in the findings of my analyses.

In Columbine news media coverage, headlines set up the tone of entire articles as one of danger and horror:

> "BULLETS FLY, STUDENTS FLEE" (*Daily News,* April 1999).
> "COLUMBINE PLUNGED INTO NIGHTMARE OF BULLETS AND BLOOD" (*Rocky Mountain News,* April 1999).

"'YOU'RE GOING TO BE DEAD': GUNMEN - TEENS
SEE PALS MOWED DOWN" (*New York Post*, April 1999).
"SOUNDS FROM A MASSACRE: 'OH GOD, KIDS,
STAY DOWN'" (*New York Times,* April 1999).

The *Daily News* and *RMN* headlines denote chaos, terror and gruesomeness, immediately conveying what happened at the school. The *New York Post* and *New York Times* ones focused on what was heard during the attack: a direct threat from an agent (one of the shooters) and the sounds heard on a 911 call — sound is an important component of this frame, something which will be explored momentarily.

Lexical techniques in coverage were 'exclusion' of key agents and 'substitution' of the words 'perpetrators' or 'shooters' with 'executioners' and 'death': "*Death* arrived at Columbine High School yesterday wearing a black trench coat and ski mask"; The *executioners* started their spree at one end of the school." This serves to further intensify the horror of the attack by making the gunmen ominous. Other techniques were using adjectives to denote feelings at that time for survivors and their parents: 'shrieking,' 'frantic,' and 'panicked.' This denotes chaos and destruction in the school environment and centres on 'behavioural transitivity': the actions students, staff and parents took at that time (Halliday 1994).

Vivid and detailed eyewitness descriptions within news media content documenting what transpired during the attack are far more affective. There are accounts from survivors, some of whom were wounded, hid from attackers and their thoughts and feelings at that time. Particularly horrific and visceral are the recollections of what happened in two locations: the library with descriptions of what the shooters said, the people they killed, and how the survivors had to play dead, as well as accounts from the rescue staff who described the carnage as one of the worst things they had ever seen; the science room where severely wounded teacher, Dave Sanders, lay with a group of students, coughing up blood, becoming paler and gradually bled to death in front of them. Also traumatising were stories from students who saw the bodies of their peers as they left the school and those who were searched by SWAT teams to ensure they did not have weapons.

The accounts of noises heard further explicate the horrific nature of being in the school at that time. The transcript of a telephone call made by a teacher during the attack in the library documented the killings taking place, where the fast rhythm of 'Bang. Bang.

Bang. Bang. Bang' in the background denotes the intensity of the gunfire. Documented in news content were the physical noises of the terror: gunfire, gunshots, glass exploding, a door handle turning, and the fire alarm wailing. The human reactions to it are perhaps even more distressing: gunmen 'laughing,' 'giggling,' 'guffawing,' 'yelling,' 'taunting victims,' and 'threatening'; whilst survivors and the victims, prior to their deaths, made the sounds of 'screaming,' 'shrieking,' 'crying for help,' 'wailing,' and 'sobbing.'. Survivors in later news stories were documented as saying the noises associated with the shooting trigger the fear once again. What makes the noises even more disturbing, however, is when they are juxtaposed with 'silence': survivors hiding in silence for hours afraid to make a noise; the dying teacher in the science room no longer talking; the quiet in the library, save the hum of computers, as victims laid dead and the scene appearing frozen in time with students' homework still laid out on the desks.

In the Columbine *YouTube* sample (June 2012-2013), a lot of the videos were footage of the events or documentary reports, which probably helped convey to people what such an event would really be like. Many comments described it as 'scary,' a few said it gave them nightmares; one even said: "If schools want to stop bullying, all they need to do is show this video." Other comments conveyed why they believed it was so frightening:

> "It would be the scariest day of your life being in the school that day."
> "This is horrific. Imagine seeing your friend die before your eyes or seeing a teacher slowly dying."
> "All you Harris and Klebold [perpetrators] admirers, put yourselves in the victims' shoes and imagine the terror they had to endure."
> "How terrifying it must be to see someone with a gun about to shoot you."

This demonstrates that *YouTube* users are empathising with the victims and survivors, imaging themselves in that situation.

The Virginia Tech news coverage follows a similar pattern to that of Columbine. A

selection of headlines showed the horrific natures of the attack, mainly by articulating the perspective of survivors during the shooting:

> "'I DIDN'T THINK THERE WAS ANY WAY I'D LIVE,' TERRIFIED STUDENT SAYS" (*Daily News*, April 2007).
> "'I SAW BULLET HOLES COMING THROUGH THE DOOR'" (*Newsweek,* April 2007).
> "I THOUGHT, 'THE NEXT SHOT IS FOR ME'" (*TIME,* April 2007).
> "CHO 'ASSUMED SHOOTING POSITION AND TOOK AIM'" (*USA Today*, April 2007).

Survivors' recollections convey a sense of what it was like to be in the Norris Hall building at the time of the attack: some describe seeing their professor and peers killed in front of them; hiding under their desk from the shooter, with one even saying they played dead by lying underneath the body of one killed; jumping out the second floor window to escape; survivors stepping over bodies and trying not to slip on blood as they escaped. Noises are once again pertinent to the reconstruction of the scene. There are those which describe the physicality of the shooting: 'wild popping of gunfire'; 'crackle of gunfire'; "gunshots echoed'; 'banging noises'; 'sirens wailed'; 'Loud bangs that sounded like construction work'; 'two loud thuds like boards clapping together'; 'Pow, pow, pow, pow''; 'Bang. Bang. Bang.' The first five descriptions make use of verbs like 'crackle,' 'banging' and 'echo' and the last two use similes to convey some sense of what it would have sounded like. The list format of 'pow' and 'bang' is a frantic rhythm that shows the methodological nature of the shooting: this is backed up with survivor accounts that 'there were far more bullets than people in that room' and medical reports that each of the deceased and wounded had been shot at least three times. A particularly upsetting aspect, however, comes with accounts of sounds of human suffering and terror: 'blood gurgling'; 'gasping for breath'; 'sobbing in panic'; 'screaming and crying'; 'scream of absolute terror'; 'quick moan or a slow one'; 'quiet, reserved yell.' Similar to the Columbine reporting, the most disquieting aspect of noises heard comes into force when juxtaposed with *silence*: the long pauses from gunshots when the shooter was reloading another magazine clip into his

weapon; the wordlessness of the shooter during the attack; silent classrooms where survivors refrain from making a sound lest the shooter thought they were still alive.

Users in the Virginia Tech *YouTube* sample (June 2012-2013) seemed to have intense reactions to the shooting. Two videos in particular helped to detail the reality of the shooting: one features an interview with a survivor recalling the odour and sounds of the attack; the other is an amateur video taken on a mobile phone by a passer-by outside Norris Hall, which had the highest level of comments within this sample. Here is a selection of user comments:

> "I'm watching this in horror. I want to go stop it [the
> shooting]. For every shotgun someone dies.""
> "With every gunshot my heart just drops."
> "My stomach got sick hearing those sounds. Sorry, I can't
> watch this."
> "I'm crying right now. The screams of students. Just the
> scariest thing I have ever heard."

Similar to the new media coverage, noises were central to the users' reactions. The fact that this video was recorded in real time aided the feelings of terror. This supports the sentiments of Mythen (2010) that media devices like mobile phones facilitate the propagation of information about 'risk events.' The 'citizen media component' has been a vital part of news stories throughout history with amateur footage being taken at events like the assassination of JFK and 9/11 (Gillmor 2007). Technologies have advanced since then providing a 'snapshot' of events as they occur (Mythen 2010).

5.3 Counteractive Culture of Fear

To give some credit to the news media, there were codes counteracting the culture of fear: rarity, reassurances and a lack of fear. The 'rarity' code points out that campus and school violence is on the decline and that school shootings are in fact really sporadic events. This relates to the idea that risks are "calculable dangers," where the probability of a threat

coming to fruition determines the risk level (Bauman, 2006: 10). Since fear and judgments of risk affect each other (Ferrrao and LaGrange, 1987: 73), it has been recommended that perceptions of risk are altered to reverse fear (Warr, 2000: 462). Mapping out the trends as a whole, however, suggests that this thematic area had very little effect in convincing people that the threat of a school shooting was low.

In a similar vein, the counteractive themes 'lack of fear' and 'school safety' evident mainly in news media coverage are discussed in the second sub-section for their potential to reverse the climate of fear developing; generally, however, it was felt that fear of future attacks — evident still in contemporary *YouTube* debates — is so strong that it might overpower these counter-narratives.

5.3.1 Schools as Safe Places

Throughout both news media samples, this code was consistently there, serving as a reminder of reality. In the Columbine news content, referred to are sources with 'established authority' because of their role and credibility (Whitaker, 1981: 31): official experts, like the *U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* and the *Department of Justice*; research organisations such as *Justice Policy Institute* and the *Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence*. Experts draw upon statistics to argue that youth violence and homicides by juveniles had decreased in recent years and even school shootings were on the decline until Columbine occurred.

Certain phrases throughout news media content really enforce the point that school violence has actually improved in recent times: "Fewer violent fatalities in schools"; "Overall, school violence is not going up"; "Schools are just about the safest place for kids." Further adding to this perception were discussions of the statistical odds of actually being killed at an educational institution: "Numbers [of deaths] too small to generalize"; "Fewer than 1% of teen gun-related deaths occur in schools"; "The chances of a child being killed on campus were 1 in 2 million." 'Risk' by nature is a calculable entity relating to a population of people, i.e. the 'odds' of becoming a victim to it (Ewald, 1991: 20). The use of very low odds, low percentages and 'too small' quickly convey the fact that the risks are minuscule.

With these sentiments in mind, it certainly seems that the odds of death in relation to a school shooting — which are relatively rare events within the wider context of gun and

school violence — being reiterated in news media content *should* in theory bring some degree of comfort to people. Paradoxically, the way people react to school shootings suggests a higher level of threat. This reaction could be said to be predicated on: 'probability blindness,' over-estimating the likelihood of a crime occurring; 'probability neglect,' focusing on worse-case scenarios based on intense emotional reactions to threats. These are detrimental because they are an over-reaction and can unnecessarily restrict people's behaviour (Gardner, 2008: 86, 131; Sunstein, 2006: 35, 37, 68). The main problem seems to be with the way news media content is presented. The views of experts on declining school violence, the provision of statistics, and the claims about schools being safe are negated by them commonly being juxtaposed with culture of fear items. For instance, an article (*TIME* 2007) in the Virginia Tech sample highlights the fact that multiple-victim murders are a very tiny portion of homicides:

> "The rate of killings in the U.S. involving five or more
> victims represented less than 1% of all homicides 25 years
> ago, and still does today."

This statistic, however, becomes meaningless when compared with headlines like 'School Violence Rises Again' (*Rocky Mountain News* 2004) and 'Worse than the War' (*Newsweek* 2009) — refer back to the 'on-going trend' discussion for more examples of these — implying that it is an epidemic. Providing some contextual information in articles is a good start to diminishing feelings of risk; however, this is it is pointless if contradicted by hyperbolic and sensationalised content.

Considering the content of letters and *YouTube* debates, it certainly seems that people are not convinced about the rarity of school shootings. There was only one letter to the editor (*The Roanoke Times*, April 2007) making the point "As awful as this tragedy [Virginia Tech] was, it was a rare incident" expressing a meta-opinion (van Dijk 1998b: 43, 59) of dismissing the call to expand concealed carry to university campuses. Likewise, the code 'rarity' was not even present in the Columbine and Virginia Tech *YouTube* samples, showing users are not acknowledging the actual level of risk involved. Theorists (Slovic 1987; Slovic *et al.* 2000) provided explanations for the distinction between 'actual' and 'perceived' risk levels as judged by lay people: 'dreaded risk' factors like threats to future generations, involvement of kids, frightening consequences, identifiable victims —

which would be applicable in the case of school shootings involving the horrific deaths of children/young adults — increase perceived levels of risk and the amount of desired regulation.

The counteractive code 'school safety' elucidates how safe schools actually are in an attempt to circumvent any fear or anxiety about safety. Schools security officials are the auspices of reassurances made, with statements like these: "We're taking all the necessary precautions that we can within our resources"; "We want a highly visible adult presence to help children feel safe." This is an effect of moral panics where key actors have to be shown to 'take action' and mobilising resources against the 'threat' (Klocke and Muschert 2010; McRobbie 1994; McRobbie and Thornton 1995). Accordingly, a salient event evoking strong emotional reactions will place pressure on officials to 'do something,' even if there is a low level of actual risk (Sunstein, 2005: 69). More will be said on the effects of these incidents on emergency management and communication in the next two chapters.

Returning to 'reassurances' now finds that quotations from experts in the areas of school safety and mass shootings provide some context to news stories and the credentials of sources makes them seem more reliable than general public soundbites (see Whitaker 1981). Specialists, after both shootings, made claims that schools are still one of the safest places for schoolchildren and young adults to be; whilst aggregation in the form of *Department of Justice* data demonstrate the very low number of mass shootings in the whole spectrum of homicide. This frame really needs to be developed and expanded to have any real effect.

5.3.2 The Absence of Fear

The *Washington Post* (April 1999) polled 500 public and private school students and 522 parents the week after Columbine: it found that almost eight in ten felt safe from school violence. Similarly, the *New York Times/CBS* survey taken one year after Columbine found that only 24% of students at rural, suburban and urban schools were concerned about their personal safety at school; whereas the previous year the figure had been 40% (quoted in *TIME* 2000). The writer of this article seems incredulous at the decrease in figures: "Kids today feel *safer* than they did five years ago? Did the pollsters feed the data into the wrong

hole?" The italicisation of 'safer' is a contrastive stress (Fowler 1991) to emphasise amazement at the fact that schoolchildren feel safer post-Columbine, which is further exemplified by the suggestion of a polling error. The incredulity at children feeling safer is likely to be counterproductive to negating fear, for it suggests that they are somehow mistaken and there is a threat they *should* feel afraid of.

In the Virginia Tech news media sample, quotes from students display a lack of fear suggest a similar sentiment: "Do I feel more vulnerable? No." "I've always felt safe at Virginia Tech"; "This is a nice place to be. This was an isolated incident." Several prospective students due to start at *Virginia Tech University* were quoted as saying they had a stronger desire to attend after the shooting, feeling that the event 'could have happened anywhere' and, 'the university would become safer after the tragedy.' This 'lack of fear' was present in the local paper *The Roanoke Times*, with only fleeting references in *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post.* This adheres to McRobbie and Thornton's (1995) and Klocke and Muschert's (2010) recommendations that moral panics have shifted to allow the public to contest and challenge claims.

No *YouTube* debates had the 'lack of fear' frame, which is perhaps not surprising considering *YouTube* users appear to coalesce there to discuss their fears. Similarly, there was only one letter displaying this theme and it was in the Virginia Tech sample. One writer wrote "I walked home two miles in the dark after the candlelight vigil without a single fear" (*The Roanoke Times*, April 2007). The earlier part of her letter speaks about how the bonds between the university and the community will still exist, despite the perpetrator's "malignant efforts" to destroy them. This suggests that her proclamation of a lack of fear is to challenge the existence of fear in order to show that the perpetrator has not managed to destroy the university community, as she still feels safe and the community remains strong in the face of the tragedy

Conclusion

What this chapter has attempted to do is to show how the emotions of 'fear,' 'panic' and 'terror' buttress a climate of fear. It has reinforced the findings of previous studies (Altheide 2009; Kupchik and Bracy 2009; Killingbeck 1999; Lawrence and Mueller 2003; Wondemaghen 2013) about the media distorting risk by portraying such incidents as an epidemic. The 'symbolic legacy' of the moral panic (Klocke and Muschert 2010) was

school shootings were naturalised as an event which can happen anywhere. When the Virginia Tech shooting occurred eight years later, it led to the 're-circulation' (Klocke and Muschert 2010) of certain aspects of the Columbine moral panic.

Retrieval of results was three-fold in nature: print news media content from up to five years after the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings (1999-2004 and 2007-2012 respectively) and from Columbine ten year anniversary; immediate public reactions of the letters to the editor written by the public shortly after each incident (April 1999; April respectively 2007) when it was 'timely' and hence 'newsworthy'; public responses to the two case studies and more recent incidents like the Sandy Hook shooting (2012), as documented comments on *YouTube* posted during the period June 2012-2013.

It was discovered that Columbine and Virginia Tech were described as the 'worst' and 'deadliest' school shootings in news media articles; therefore, becoming the benchmark to compare other incidents against. These items are 'risk signatures' (see Petts *et al.* 2001), immediately denoting images, feelings, and a definition. Specifically, the term 'Columbine' was incorporated in the lexicon of school shootings, representing a particular type of youth violence. News media items in my sample circumscribed school shootings and other mass killings as an 'epidemic' and 'on-going trend,' by using terms like 'yet another one' and 'once again': this portrays the phenomenon as something affecting many people adhering to the 'problem frame' (Altheide 1997). Echoing the findings of Wondemaghen's (2013) research, news media content framed the Columbine shooting within the wider trends of school shootings and youth gun violence more generally. The newsweeklies, *Newsweek* and *TIME*, were particularly prolific in this trend, most likely a result of the scope of articles to refer to past incidents and macro-level factors, hence contextualising issues via the 'thematic frame' (Aaroe 2011; Iyengar 1991; Gross 2008). Moreover, it was quite common that *Newsweek* and *TIME* were utilising culture of fear themes in articles trying to gain support for a purported solution to the problem, usually tighter gun regulations or improved school security measures. Although it is outside the scope of this thesis, it would be interesting to test this against Iyengar's (1991) finding that 'thematic frames' increase support for suggested proposals to resolve the issue.

The portrayal of school shootings in this way led to the 'normalisation' of school shootings, where it appears as a naturalised occurrence with the potential to happen anywhere. Risk levels in relation to the *actual* odds of an incident occurring were distorted in news media content. This was particularly prevalent in the following sources:

newsweeklies *Newsweek* and *TIME*, which have greater scope for contextualising issues and using conversational language (see Mayr and Machin 2012); the broadsheet *The Washington Post* and the tabloid *USA Today*, both of which scored quite highly on the left-leaning bias scale (see Groseclose and Milyo 2005). Reinforced here were findings of previous studies (Altheide 2009; Burns and Crawford 1999; Kupchik and Bracy 2009; Killingbeck 1999; Lawrence and Mueller 2003) that news media distorted perceptions of risk in relation to school violence. Normalisation' of a phenomenon is a key element of the culture of fear (Glassner 2004) and the final stage of a moral panic, cementing its 'symbolic legacy' which can re-emerge in future ones (Klocke and Muschert 2010).

With normalisation setting the foundations for the climate of fear, the next stage is the entrenchment of fear, anxiety and terror. Fear is linked to the need to anticipate danger (Furedi, 1997; Jackson 2004, 2009; Jackson and Gray 2010; Warr 2000) and can lead to 'probability blindness' overestimating about the actual threat faced (Gardner 2008; Sunstein 2005). The 'fear of future attack' theme was prolific throughout sources quoted in news media content, particularly in the Columbine sample. In the immediate coverage after incidents, concern about future attacks and insecurity about school safety from affected groups of students, teachers and parents were prevalent; this mirrors Altheide's (1997) theory that 'tales of fear' contribute to a culture of fear. Further, the presence of opinion polls in news stories quantified feelings of fear and anxiety (Furedi 1997; Lee 2007).

When it comes to fear, I have theorised that the schemata (Entman 1993) surrounding the 'threat' is stored away between school shooting events and re-emerges after the most recent attack. Salience of news coverage is, therefore, pertinent to the presence of fear (Sunstein 2005; Wahlberg and Sjoberg 2000). The 'normalisation' frames makes the risk appear commonplace, as though it *will* occur at some point. Interestingly, I found that *YouTube* comments were a ripe location for on-going discussions of the definitions of school shootings; news media and letter coverage, by contrast, were useful for examining immediate, culturally proximate viewpoints on the shootings by local residents and key groups (schoolchildren, parents, etc.).Letters written by schoolchildren elucidated that their school could 'be next.' There was also the defeatist sentiment in letters and *YouTube* comments accepting that these incidents *will* occur again and that every school is vulnerable. Glassner (2004) pointed to normalising as a key mechanism in the creation of a culture of fear. In particular, it does seem that Columbine entrenched feelings of fear and worry to an elevated level, even fourteen years later as documented in *YouTube* comments.

By contrast, the 'fear of future attack' was only a transient frame in the Virginia Tech news media and *YouTube* samples. The marginal role this frame played in Virginia Tech, compared to its prolific nature with regards to Columbine, is indicative of particular conditions and 'shock value' required for a climate of fear to develop.

Further, letters after Columbine and present day *YouTube* debates indicate that schoolchildren and university students are embracing the 'symbolic victim' stance (Altheide 2002b; Garland 2001), where being 'at risk' becomes a part of identity (Furedi 1997, 2008; Gardner 2008; Wahlberg and Sjoberg 2000). This 'acknowledgment of powerlessness' (Furedi 2008) comes about in them anticipating that the *potential* for them to become a school shooting victim is omnipresent (Jackson 2009; Jackson and Gray 2010). The result is them devising strategies to avoid this such as circumspectly sitting near a window in class. There is a noticeable difference in fear felt between the public reactions to Columbine and Virginia Tech, where university students do not demonstrate the same levels of fear as schoolchildren: could it be the fact that school kids *have* to go to school, whereas higher education is optional?

Serving to fuel fear is the 'terror' frame in news media coverage, which provided graphic, detailed descriptions of the shooting attacks, mainly based on eyewitnesses' recollections. A pivotal element to news stories was 'sound,' where the scene is brought to life via recollections of noises heard during the shooting: human suffering, such as frightened screams, groans of pain, and blood gurgling from wounds; what the shooters did during the incident (giggling, yelling in excitement and taunting victims in the case of Columbine perpetrators; the Virginia Tech shooter saying nothing at all; the fast rhythm of gunfire denoting how quickly the attack unfolded. These noises are juxtaposed with silence which further builds up a sense of foreboding: the stillness in the post-shooting scene, as the victims lie dead and survivors are afraid to make a sound; the complete silence of the Virginia Tech shooter whilst he methodologically shot at people; the pauses in shooting as the perpetrators reloaded their weapons to inflict more damage. This backs up the argument by Wahlberg and Sjoberg (2000: 44) that the descriptiveness of news media articles affects people's perception of risk. The visceral nature of such material encourages *YouTube* users to emphasise with the victims and survivors, as they imagine themselves in that situation and how terrifying it would be.

The presence of the counteractive 'reassurance' codes of 'rarity,' 'lack of fear,' and 'school safety,' covered here are useful in showing the fear levels entrenched within 'cultural scripts' (Garland 2001) relating to school shootings are excessive. These adopt a pragmatic interpretation of risk where probability determines risk levels (Bauman 2006; Ewald 1991).Within articles, there were accounts of school security action being taken, and the views of experts and statistics to elucidate how safe educational institutions are. The statuses of these sources (see Philo 2007; Tricson *et al.* 1989; Whitaker 1981) provide more credibility than perhaps the general sound bites of the public. These tended to be evident in local news sources, the *Rocky Mountain News,* the *Roanoke Times* and *Richmond Times Dispatch*; broadsheet papers *New York Times* and *Washington Post*; and to, a lesser extent, the newsweeklies *Newsweek* and *TIME* — the sporadic appearances of this theme in these sources was particularly surprising given their scope for 'thematic framing' (Iyengar 1991). By contrast, the tabloid papers *Daily News* and *New York Post*, known for having short and dramatic news pieces, made almost no references to these themes.

Despite the presence of realistic interpretations around school shootings in news media content, the effects of this thematic area seem only rudimentary in nature. The reason being is that such content is commonly juxtaposed with the sensationalised content mentioned above: news articles provide statistics and claims that schools are safe places and school shootings are rare; whilst having hyperbolic and sensationalised content, such as the headline 'America's Mass Murder Epidemic.' The counteractive culture of fear code is, therefore, rendered ineffective, for, at this stage, the sensationalised content may have already have caused 'probability blindness' (Gardner 2008; Sunstein 2005). What I would say is that the 'school safety' code is the media frame with the most promise of circumventing a climate of fear, given it details school security action being taken and draws upon expertise to elucidate how safe educational institutions actually are. In this news media sample, however, it was not pronounced and prolific enough for it to really have much of an impact.

This chapter documented the components making up of a culture of fear. In chapters six and seven respectively, this section will now turn to document the emergency management and communication measures implemented after the Columbine and Virginia Tech attacks.

6. Managing School Shootings: Plans and Responses

Introduction

The next stage of moral panic development is the 'regulation' period where avenues of social control are promoted to deal with the perceived problem (Klocke and Muschert 2010). This chapter will focus on 'crisis management,' planning for and responding to acts of violence (Pagliocca and Nickerson, 2001: 385). Proactive mechanisms like detection are more effective than reaction (Schneier, 2006: 143) and so it has been said that "the best way to manage a crisis is to prevent one" (Coombs, 2012: 31). Since something like 'risk' cannot be completely eliminated (Borghesi and Gaudenzi, 2013: 19), emergency management planning, communication (to be discussed in the next chapter) and prevention efforts are all pivotal to achieving an 'acceptable level' of risk (Sokolow *et al.*, 2008: 347). In terms of school shootings, post-hoc analysis following a crisis situation can inform future emergency management planning (Heath *et al.*, 2009: 125).

Results for this chapter come from: analyses of news media content and letters to the editor from the Columbine sample relating to law enforcement response; *YouTube* comments from the Columbine and Virginia Tech samples about the law enforcement responses; assessments of policy documents in the Columbine and Virginia Tech samples; presentations at the 'School Safety Symposium' (2013) (see http://thebriefings.org); legislation tracked via the *National Conference of State Legislatures*; survey research taken from other studies to show the measurable effects; relevant theories relating to fear and risk management.

This chapter traces the trajectory of developments in emergency management planning and training from Columbine through to Virginia Tech and beyond (see appendix D for a list of key legislative changes). First of all, I intend to go through the weaknesses in the emergency management plan at *Columbine High School* prior the shooting and document the recommendations made in policy documents in my sample. After that, the legislative and practical changes made to plans and training will be discussed. The section will then move on to discuss the flaws in emergency planning highlighted by the Virginia Tech shooting and how these were addressed by *Virginia Tech University* itself and on the state

and national levels as policy-makers proposed 'remedies' to the defined problem (Entman, 1993: 52). Findings will be located within moral panic theories (Hall *et al.* 1978; Garland 2008; Klocke and Muschert 2010). I will follow a similar process for discussing emergency management training changes after both shootings; on-going developments in this area will also be documented.

The final section will centre on the changes to law enforcement tactics and resources following each case study. This is of particular relevance to the Columbine shooting, where attributions of blame and responsibility were aimed at law enforcement for the delayed response. What will be discussed is the presence and absence of the 'blaming law enforcement' theme in news media and letters to the editor for the case of Columbine only; this was something that was not covered in media discourse after Virginia Tech. Interestingly, the next subsection will show that *YouTube* users in the Columbine sample were extremely critical and held law enforcement responsible for the high death toll; whilst *YouTube* commentators appeared to be divided on the police response to Virginia Tech. I want to finish by documenting the changes made to law enforcement operational response, as well as expansion of the jurisdiction of campus law enforcement at *Virginia Tech University.*[60]

6.1 Emergency Management Plans

In this section, I will go through the emergency management planning developments prior to and following Columbine and Virginia Tech respectively. What will be discussed in each sub-section are: the weaknesses identified in emergency management plans as a result of the shootings; and the legislative and practical changes made to plans at the national, state and internal (*VTU* only, the reasons why will be explained later on) levels.

6.1.1 Columbine Shooting: Emergency Management Plans

The basis for risk management is assessing vulnerabilities that are contributing to the probability that a crisis will develop (Coombs, 2012: 40). My analyses of policy

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[60] This will be referred to as *VTU* from this point onwards.

documents[61] in the Columbine sample documented the weaknesses in emergency management plans prior to both shootings. Prior to the Columbine incident, the Jefferson County crisis plan outlined roles covered a number of scenarios, such as fire and a teacher suffering from a heart attack, but there was nothing remotely similar to the events on April 20th 1999 — this is rather surprising given a number of school shootings had occurred already nationally at that point in time. The absence of such a risk in planning meant that no strategies would be put into place to eliminate or reduce it (Coombs, 2012: 41). Another element missing from plans was building layout and this delayed the response of police and other rescue personnel (this will also be discussed in the third section of this chapter).

All policy documents in the Columbine sample mandated that every school in Colorado should be required to develop an emergency crisis plan, with the assistance of local law enforcement, school resource officers at that school, and rescue agencies. The main factors to be taken into account are the needs of that school, the hierarchical structure of who can authorise what within the school, and the expected consequences of emergencies (i.e. what will be needed) — this final factor is very important as schools will require different responses to emergencies based on the age range of the student population, building and campus layout, alarm systems, etc. throughout the school. Allowing for the expansion of emergency management plans to cover a broad range of worst case scenarios is a form of 'possibilistic thinking': searching for vulnerabilities by asking 'what if this happened' (Furedi, 2008: 648, 651-653).

Policy documents' recommendations were translated into policy in 2000, when the Colorado General Assembly passed the 'Safe Schools Act' (2000), C.R.S. 22-32-109.1, requiring each school district board in the state to adopt a emergency management plan, crisis management procedures, and employee training. This framework had to adhere to the 'National Incident Management System': a federal-level framework of four principles for responding to crises consisting of organisational structures and strategies, intended to allow first responders from different jurisdictions and agencies to be able to coordinate more effectively (definition taken from Brock *et al.* 2012: 466; Coombs, 2012: 85). It was not possible to analyse the *Columbine High School* plan[62] to see what changes had been made since the shooting. Nationally, it also seems that there was some impact on schools. A

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[61] Refer back to the 'Research Sample' chapter for details of both samples, which include federal, state level and internal (Virginia Tech only) policy documents.

[62] After searching for this online to no avail, I got in touch with John McDonald, the Executive Director of Emergency Management for Jefferson County Schools — *Columbine High* would fall under the remit of this district — and he said the plans are not publicly available for safety reasons. Interested readers are directed to Riley (2011) for further information on the dangers of publicising changes to school safety plans.

survey for the *U.S. Department of Justice* found that in 2001 84.7% of respondents had a plan in place to deal with a shooting situation (Travis and Lawrence, 2002: 79).

In another vein, the *Federal Bureau of Investigation* (2000) policy document (immediate, federal) recommended the establishment of 'school resource officers'[63] in schools. This brings to mind Furedi's (2008: 656) claim that police are crucial to emergency management because "the vulnerable need to be not only supported but also protected." As it transpired, following Columbine, federal-level funding was bestowed in the form of *COPS* grants totalling $70 million to fund six hundred SRO positions across the U.S. (*The White House* 1999). Throughout 1999-2001, the number of security guards in schools increased from 59% to 69% and rose to 74% in 2003 (cited in Addington, 2009: 1432). Amongst schools with SROs, the highest cited reason (24.5%) for employing them was 'national media attention about school violence' (Travis and Coon, 2002: 12).

The 'cost' of a risk reduction measure is generally weighed against the potential costs if the risk were to transpire (Coombs, 2012: 41). Given the cost of SROs totals $125 thousand on average for each one over a three year period (Raymond, 2010: 19, 26), this is something which schools have to carefully consider. On the one hand, Garcia's (2003: 51) study found that school safety administrators consider SROs to be valuable security assets; likewise, it was theorised elsewhere that the presence SROs could reduce the victimisation of school personnel (Brown, 2006: 599). Overall, it seems that decisions on whether to spend money employing SROs or private security guards should be guided by whether there are more general disciplinary problems within the school, such as assaults on teachers rather than 'reacting' to saturated news coverage of school shootings.

Moreover, all policy documents in the Columbine sample appealed that the jurisdiction of school resource officers should be clearly defined in order to prescribe their role and authority in managing emergency incidents like school shootings. SROs are likely to be the first responders in dealing with a crisis, so they need to be involved in developing management plans and managing emergencies (Raymond, 2010: 5). Furthermore, survey research carried out post-Columbine found that law enforcement had worked on the development of emergency management plans in 54.6% of cases (Travis and Lawrence, 2002: 84) — more will be said on law enforcement tactical training in the next section.

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[63] School resource officers will now be referred to as SROs. These police officers have a more complicated job than a traditional law enforcement role: educating on safety matters, such as drug abuse and crime; a correctional one, addressing crime and disorder on campus and making arrests; acting in a counselling capacity for students who have any concerns or problems, such as bullying. (Raymond, 2010: 3-5).

6.1.2 Virginia Tech Shooting: Emergency Management Plan[64]

The policy document 'Report to the President' (2007) (immediate, federal) in the Virginia Tech sample noted that many educational institutions already had emergency management plans, a result of a post 9/11 mind-set of being prepared and learning from previous school violence incidents. At the time of the Virginia Tech shooting, natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina (2005) had also made school security a focus (Rasmussen and Johnson, 2008: 14). Then-president George W. Bush ordered a conference in late 2006 to discuss school safety measures, preparing for emergencies, and ways to help communities recover from violent school attacks. At the conference, the Attorney General in the Bush administration (2000-2008) advised that emergency management plans are constantly reiterated to deal with staff and student turnover (*The White House* 2006). Guidance was made available from the *Department of Homeland Security* — the most recent version of which was published in 2010 — on how to develop an emergency management plan.

Research[65] undertaken into the impact of Virginia Tech found that 88% of respondents had revised or were currently revising their emergency management plans (Gray, 2008: 20). A different research project[66] found that 85% of respondents had an emergency management plan and, of the remaining 15% without one, almost fourth-fifths had been in the stages of devising a plan (*National Association of College and University Business Owners*, 2008: 10-11).

At the state-level, Virginia code VA. § 23-9.2:9 'Institutional crisis and emergency management plan; review required; annual functional exercise required' (2008, cc. 450, 526), was enacted in early 2008 requiring all public institutions of higher education to have

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[64] Similar to the previous sub-section, recommendations relating to emergency management have been divided by federal and state level changes and then ones to *Virginia Tech University*.

[65] An online questionnaire was e-mailed to *Campus Safety* subscribers during the last week of January 2008. Additionally, the survey was posted on *Campus Safety's* Web site (www.campussafetymagazine.com) during the same period. 30% of the respondents indicated their campuses were located in the Northeast; 29% in the Midwest; 22% in the South; and 19% in the West. Of the 437 individuals who responded to the survey, 75% said they worked for educational campuses.

[66] In late August 2008, the survey was sent electronically to primary representatives at the 2,203 colleges and universities that were members of NACUBO at the time. By the end of September 2008, 342 colleges and universities had responded to the survey – a response rate of 16%. Geographically, responding colleges and universities were located throughout the country. About 33% of the respondents came from institutions located in the South, 26% came from the Midwest, 23% came from the East and 17% came from the West.

emergency management plans and to coordinate these with local community ones; every year the president or vice-president of every institution is to review and make any necessary revisions to the plan; the institution shall carry out training; after four years, the plan is to be reviewed and submitted to the Virginia 'Department of Emergency Management.'

Although Colorado had already taken action in the past, the Virginia Tech shooting prompted the Governor of Colorado to make school safety a priority item once again. In 2008, he signed bill C.R.S. 24-33.5-11801, which established the *Colorado School Safety Resource Center* to provide assistance and funding to schools in preparing for and responding to emergency situations. Moreover, the Colorado 'Safe Schools Act' (2000), codified at C.R.S 22-32-109.1, was amended in 2008 to mandate that all school districts had to incorporate components of the 'National Response Framework' into emergency management plans. The actions to be taken were: devising a plan to meet the date of compliance (1 July 2009); adopting both the 'National Incident Management System,' the federal-level framework for dealing with emergencies and the 'Incident Command System,' of designating roles based on a hierarchical structure, as the management structures to organise crisis responses; form relationships and communicate with local responders to check adherence to local, county and state level plans; define the roles and responsibilities of community partners through memoranda of understanding; engage in practice schedules, such as drills and tabletop (simulation) exercises; partake in an annual inventory of emergency equipment. Revised Statutes in the 2012 Colorado General Assembly made the legislative declaration that "emergency response and crisis management measures should be implemented in all communities within the state to protect students and school personnel" (C.R.S. 24-33.5-1801, 2(b)).

The most notable changes were to *VTU* itself.[67] Policy analyses (immediate, state) of the Virginia Tech sample discovered that *VTU*'s current emergency management plan did not cover shootings. Additionally, at the time of the shooting, the university's plan was two years old meaning it had out-dated information in it, such as the name of a previous police chief. The policy documents also found that law enforcement did not play enough of a role in emergency management operations at Virginia Tech and responsibility instead fell to the

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[67] This is something reflecting the differences between my two case studies. I was unable to ascertain how the *Columbine High* emergency management plan had changed because it was not publicly available. On the other hand, *Virginia Tech University* publicised its emergency management plans online, most likely for prospective students (and their parents) to see.

'Policy Group' to deal with emergency operations and the 'Emergency Response Resources Group' to act as a support to the first group and provide resources. In this situation, the point that Coombs (2012: 106) makes about the danger of having a plan in place providing a false sense of security certainly seems convincing: *VTU*'s plan had limited usefulness when actually applied to a crisis because the plan had not been revised to adhere to changing conditions.

Reports (immediate, state) in the policy sample gave the following recommendations for *VTU* to improve its emergency management plan: incorporation of federal and state guidelines; outline a variety of scenarios to be considered and provide guidance on which situations require lockdown or the cancellation of classes; campus police are to be included in emergency management planning. Similarly, *Virginia Tech University* policy documents (immediate, internal) recommended that the hierarchy of responsibilities and roles included in planning and the plan itself should be updated immediately and every year thereafter — rather important since out-dated information was a major weakness of the plan at the time of the shooting. It also recommended that the 'Policy Group' — the main source of command which devises a plan of action in an emergency situation and gives orders to the director of campus security and chief of police — establishes a successive hierarchy to account for absent members at the time of an event; there should also be a procedure in place to notify absent members of what is unfolding. This fits with Power's (2005: 61) conceptualisation of an 'intelligent risk management' strategy as one which is formalised, critical and part of broader organisational narratives (Power, 2004: 61).

Consequently, *Virginia Tech University*'s emergency management plan was updated and the head of campus police was appointed as a member of the planning committee. Illustrating the incorporation of these recommendations is the most recent version of the *Virginia Tech University* emergency management plan (January 2012), which was guided by the federal-level framework of the 'Incident Command System' and Virginia law. In accordance with the Code of Virginia §23-9.2:9 (2008, cc. 450, 526), the *VTU* Board of Visitors department was required to develop and retain a written plan, whilst the President and Vice-Presidents are mandated to annually review this plan. Furthermore, it outlines the different members of the Policy Group, the authorising body in the case of an emergency (*VTU* 2012). The detailed and transparent nature of the emergency management plan meets the requirements of an 'integrated risk management approach' showing the stages of decision-making (Borghesi and Gaudenzi 2013; Power 2004).

6.2 Emergency Management Training

Sjoberg *et al.* (2005: 614) noted that risk management has to be reactive to some extent. Trying to predict something as catastrophic as 9/11, for instance, would have been near impossible; the best to hope for would be making such a spectacular event *manageable* with advance planning and training. This is also true in the case of school shootings, as it is impossible to predict how every possible scenario would unfold and to monitor every threat from students, staff and outsiders. What could be pertinent to how many lives are saved is how school shootings are managed: advanced training and being reactive to the particular situation are the ways to ensure optimal management of the crisis.

This section will go through the emergency management training deficiencies identified by the Columbine shooting. It will thereafter outline the effect of the 'standard response protocol' developed by the *I Love U Guys* foundation utilised for emergency management training in Jefferson County, where *Columbine High* is located, and in other school districts across the nation. Finishing off this sub-section, there will be a discussion about the changes to law enforcement training following the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings; of particular note is the impact on *VTU* and how this has redefined the role of campus police in emergency management.

6.2.1 Columbine Shooting: Emergency Management Training

Although Columbine High had begun to work on its response plan pre-incident, the staff themselves had only ever been trained for fire drills. The lack of consideration given to a school shooting situation in emergency management training meant that strategies were not devised to reduce it (Coombs, 2012: 41). Policy documents in the Columbine sample suggested there should be frequent mandatory training sessions of 'table top' also involving first responders, tailored to a variety of scenarios and protocols of actions to take in an emergency. At the 'School Safety Symposium' (2013), Sergeant AJ DeAndrea (*Arvada Police Department*), a SWAT member involved in Columbine and two other school shooting incidents, explained law enforcement training had changed since Columbine: "We have honed into down into a single response really driven by our school resource officers."

Something which has transformed emergency management training is the 'standard response protocol' developed by the *I Love U Guys Foundation* (see figure 12 below).[68]

Figure 12: Components of the Standard Response Protocol.[69]

This organisation put together a training package for parents and educators, said to turn the 'what if' of emergency management plans into 'how to' (John Michael Keyes, *I Love U Guys*). The basis of this protocol is the federal-level guide (*Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools* 2007) on crisis planning, which distinguishes between response actions in different situations. 'Evacuation' would take place in a situation where staff and students have to leave the building; thus refuge points should be decided in advance, taking into consideration the needs of disabled students. The 'reverse evacuation' scenario would occur when the incident is outside and students are re-entering the school. When students are unable to leave or move through the building 'lockdown' occurs (*OSDFS,* 2007 3-7, 3-8). The 'standard response protocol' devised by *I Love U Guys* consists of four options: lockdown, when there is a threat inside the building; lockout, in the case of criminal activity outside; evacuation, allowing for escape; shelter, for seeking refuge. In the case of a lockout, the priority of staff in this scenario is to account for every student. A 'lockdown' scenario would be more problematic to manage, with the 'time barrier' between the threat and potential victims — utilised through a locked door and lights being switched off to hide from the threat — being crucial to safety (John Michael Keyes, *I Love U Guys Foundation*). This framework has been described as the 'safety nexus' of Jefferson County, Colorado, the district where Columbine High is located, allowing for them to converse

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[68] Refer back to the 'Research Sample' chapter for details about this organisation.
[69] This photograph was taken from: *Essential Safety Protocol.* (n.d.) 'Resources.' *http://www.esp-ui.com/resources.html.*

with and train over eighty-two thousand school students (John McDonald, *Jefferson County School District*).[70] Consequently, *I Love U Guys* is working on expanding the standard response protocol to schools across the nation, something which will likely change the face of emergency management training in future.

Another notable change was recommended in the 'Wanton Violence' (2001) and 'Governor's Commission' (2001) reports (immediate; federal, state) in the Columbine policy sample: training staff members with local community partners and first responders (law enforcement, medical, fire) and highlighting the roles and responsibilities of every actor. Following up on those recommendations, the amended Colorado 'Safe Schools Act' (2008), C.R.S 22-32-109.1, mandated certain *Federal Emergency Management Agency* training courses: 'ICS100Ca, An Introduction to ICS for Schools,' for those designated as members of a safety team and their alternatives; 'IS362 Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools,' for those responsible for developing emergency response plans. In 2011, this was amended to include the 'Colorado Interoperable Communications Training Program,' an online school safety program.

After investigating 2008 bill C.R.S 22-32-109.1 further, *I Love U Guys* found the legislative change did have an effect: fire, medical, and law enforcement response agencies were using a shared language and had a clear management structure (John Michael Keyes, *I Love U Guys Foundation*). Sergeant AJ DeAndrea (*Arvada Police Department*) also spoke about how the integration of fire personnel in the law enforcement rescues was pertinent to the success of an operation: "Law enforcement saves lives by stopping the killer; fire saves lives by getting their hands on people and getting them to a place and a trauma facility." It is likely that relationships between rescue agencies and training involving all involved (educators, students, first responders) will improve reactions should an incident transpire.

Something that has to be taken into account when devising training plans, however, is that the first responders to a school shooting incident could actually be the administrators and teachers who are there when events unfold, especially if they occur in the classroom — this is undoubtedly contributing to the 'arming teachers' movement, which will be discussed in the concluding chapter. Accordingly, the Secret Service report (long-term, federal) in the Columbine policy sample found that only 27% of school shooting incidents

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[70] When paraphrasing or directly quoting speakers at the School Safety Symposium they will be referenced by name and affiliation.

were stopped by law enforcement, whilst the rest had intervention from staff members or the shooter committing suicide.

6.2.2 Virginia Tech Shooting: Emergency Management Training

The 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) document (immediate, state) highlighted the fact that, prior to the shooting, *VTU* did not include shooting scenarios in its training package. It was, therefore, recommended that students, staff and faculty members at *VTU* should frequently train in a variety of emergency situations including school shootings. This can be related back to the previous subsection on training after Columbine, which noted that staff are likely to be the first responders in a situation before law enforcement arrive — the notion of unified self-defence is undoubtedly something which is driving the 'arming teachers' and 'concealed carry on campus' movements at schools and higher education institutions respectively.

The changes to emergency management training are measurable at the level of *VTU*. At the time of the shooting, the campus police officers at *VTU* had frequently trained with local law enforcement: the coordinated response between both agencies on April 16th was praised by the 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) policy document (immediate, state). The 'Campus Attacks' (2008) document (long-term, federal) recorded that 20% of violent attacks occurred off-campus, thus making communication between campus and local law enforcement critical. It was found that *VTU*'s 'Rescue Square and Police Department' trained in a 'common language' to facilitate communications, particularly radio transmissions, with Virginia's emergency rescue agencies (*Virginia Tech*, 2008: 12).

An additional change was the provision of training to officials involved in managing emergencies, funded by a *Department of Education* grant (*VTU*, 2008: 3). Following the shooting, 'active shooter' situations also became a focus of joint training between *VTU* and local police departments (*VTU*, 2008: 3). Active shooters differ from other types of shootings because the perpetrator intends to kill and injure as many people as possible; therefore, it is the rarest but the deadliest possible scenario to occur (see, for instance, Kelly 2012; McGinty 2011). The threat of an 'active shooter' in a school shooting scenario shows why the campus and local police forces are becoming 'militarised' by normalising specialist tactics, such as that of SWAT teams (Kraska and Kappeler 1997; Kraska 2007).

An issue discussed in policy documents was a campus 'lockdown' in the case of emergencies. The state-level 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) report noted that locking down the university on the day of the shooting would have been dangerous given the fact that it was the size of a small city, housing one hundred and thirty-one buildings, all of which had multiple entrances. In terms of measureable effects, Rasmussen and Johnson's (2008: 19) survey found that only a third of survey respondents actually installed systems enabling classroom buildings to be locked down from a remote location. The main problem with lockdown procedures in the context of colleges and universities is that law enforcement would need to know where the attacker was to avoid possibly locking down a building containing the attacker and potential victims; therefore, this type of emergency management training is not really applicable

6.3 Emergency Management Response: Changes to Law Enforcement Tactics

This section will begin by tracking critical sentiments about the law enforcement responses to incidents, particularly Columbine. I will discuss how policy documents did not really criticise law enforcement actions in either shooting. I will then move on to discuss how news media discourse appeared to overlook the law enforcement response to some extent by its use of sources (Philo 2007; Tricson *et al.* 1989; Whitaker 1981) and terms used (van Dijk 1998b) to describe the predicament the SWAT team faced. Following that, the thoughts of letter writers and *YouTube* users conveyed through various lexical techniques (Fairclough 1995; Mayr and Machin 2012; Parlmer 1976/1981; van Dijk 1998b) will be shown to reflect disgust at the actions of law enforcement, principally in the case of Columbine, and a growing sense of distrust in the abilities of *police.* The next part of the section will expand on the changes made to law enforcement tactics after each shooting, using findings from policy analyses and the 'School Safety' symposium.

6.3.1 Criticisms of Law Enforcement Response

The introduction to this thesis set the background context to the law enforcement response at Columbine. I will examine the reaction for each of the following datasets: policy, news

media, and letters (all of which were written around the time of the shooting), and *YouTube* (recent thoughts on the matter).

In the policy sample, there seemed to be no direct criticism of the SWAT team's response; rather, weaknesses identified were that the school resource officers needed to be trained in SWAT techniques and to partake in joint training exercise with local law enforcement units. The policy documents in the sample generally praised the actions of law enforcement calling response 'prompt' and 'effective' and commended the joint training of local and campus police, particularly for covering active shooter situations. The only real criticism that the VTRP (2007/2009) authors had was that the evacuation process was frightening to some of the survivors; but it was acknowledged the police had their priorities right because there might have been a second shooter.

Throughout the news media sample, there were numerous quotations attempting to justify the actions of the SWAT team, all from sources with 'established authority' because of their role (Whitaker, 1981: 31) and thus representing 'authorised' versions of reality (Tricson *et al.*, 1989: 3). New media discourse exercises 'power in discourse' (Fairclough 1989) by selecting the claims and voices that are included and excluded (Delli-Carpini 2005; Tricson *et al.* 1989; Whitaker 1981). The sources used to make statements in the public sphere are the 'primary definers' of reality, whilst the media reporting on these acts as a 'secondary definer' (Hall *et al.* 1978). Analysing this involves looking at which explanations were absent or present in a text and how some accounts were 'preferred' (i.e. endorsed through a process of highlighting) in a text (Philo, 2007: 179). This selection of sources in this news media sample adheres to Lukes' (2005: 85) theory of 'power' as "the ability to constrain the choices of others, coercing or securing their compliance." For example, the Attorney General at that time, Janet Reno, called the response "a textbook of how to conduct an investigation" (*USA Today*, April 1999), where her 'established authority' (Whitaker 1981) appears to legitimise that particular viewpoint. There is a *Daily News* report (April 1999) that seemed especially biased in its use of sources, by only speaking to sources that defended the actions of the SWAT team. By omitting the critics from the report is denotes who are excluded from having a say and, by implication, who are the 'authorised' knowers about this matter (Tricson *et al.*, 1989: 4). This 'silence' is an example of under-emphasis used to nullify undesirable ideas (Lasswell, 1938: 208)

Throughout the Columbine news media sample, that there was reluctance to assign blame to the SWAT team. References to prepositional phrases like 'criticism,' 'heavy

criticism,' and 'scattered criticism' show the 'circumstances'; whilst verbs like 'endured' and 'came under' were commonly used and indicate the 'processes' happening to the affected agents (SWAT teams). To begin with, in my news media sample, headlines exonerated the SWAT team to a certain extent:

> 'SWAT team hampered by confusion' (*Denver Post*, May 2000);
> 'Officers defend response: Gunmen introduced unforeseen threats.' (*Denver Post*, April 1999);
> 'Cops did their best in tough spot: NYPD experts' (*New York Post*, April 1999);
> 'Response in Littleton Was Swift, But Unsure; Communications Woes Hindered Police (*Washington Post*, May 1999);

The adjectives of 'hampered,' 'hindered,' 'unsure,' 'unforeseen' and 'tough' all denote an 'evaluative belief' (van Dijk, 1998b: 29), presupposing that these were the 'circumstances' that affected the SWAT team's actions.

On the contrary, there were some limited examples of criticisms in the news media sample:

> "Why didn't police simply storm through the building until they found Harris and Klebold?" (*Washington Post*, May 1999);
> "In one critical area, the incident was unlike Columbine: German police moved quickly to storm the building, showing admirable courage by disregarding their own safety to rush to the aid of children in danger" (*Denver Post*, April 2002).

The first one is an 'evaluative belief' (van Dijk 1998b) questioning why the key collective agents did not engage in certain actions. In the second example, the phrase 'unlike Columbine' is pertinent here, for it, by 'implicature': what is suggested, but not explicated in a statement (Grice 1981). Here it denotes that the reaction of police during Columbine *failed* to parallel actions during the Germany school shooting, where the police are said to have displayed 'admirable courage,' 'disregarded their own safety' and saved 'children in danger.'

The sources criticising the law enforcement response tended to be limited to sources without 'established authority' (Tricson *et al.* 1989; Whitaker 1991): students, parents and the daughter of Dave Sanders, the teacher who bled to death. Some students claimed that they urged the SWAT team to go inside the building and were rebuffed (*Rocky Mountain News*, April 1999; *TIME,* December 1999). One parent, Dale Todd, of a wounded student drew upon preposition (van Dijk 1998b), arguing he expected officers to be injured after the rescue operation: "I expected dead officers, crippled officers, disfigured officers" (cited in *TIME*, December 1999).The daughter of Dave Sanders is quoted as saying the SWAT team were active and responsible for making students in the classroom leave Sanders behind: "They wanted to take him out when they left, and the SWAT team wouldn't let them. It really makes me mad, because we know he could have made it" (*TIME*, April 1999).

There were only two letters in the Columbine news sample that were coded under this theme, but they are notable for their criticism of law enforcement response. One letter (*The Denver Post*, April 1999a) opened with an evocative question: "Why did highly trained SWAT teams retreat and establish defensive positions outside Columbine High School while gunmen terrorized students for more than two hours inside the school?" The combination of the adverb 'highly' and adjective 'trained' is an 'evaluative belief,' (van Dijk 1998b) presupposing a characteristic of the SWAT team, with the assumption being that they were *able* to take action because of this training. The verb 'retreat' is a type of 'predicate' (Fowler, 1991): in this case, affecting students by allowing them to be 'terrorised' by gunmen. The same letter also questioned "How many more students would have died had the gunmen not taken their own lives?" This is surmising what may have transpired (i.e. more deaths) if the gunmen had not killed themselves. Through this pre-supposition — something which is implied as something known and true (van Dijk, 1998b: 34) — the writer lays blame to the SWAT team for not taking action sooner and indirectly

suggests the only reason so many students survived was because the perpetrators committed suicide. The letter finishes off with "Students and faculty demonstrated heroism and courage under fire. Can the same be said for the SWAT teams outside the school?" The rhetorical question, by implication, suggests that the SWAT teams did *not* demonstrate 'heroism' and 'courage': an 'evaluative belief,' (van Dijk 1998b), supposing the existence of these values in the other agents of students and staff. The reference to 'outside the school' is a form of 'addition,' supplementing the original proposition (Mayr and Machin 2012), to demonstrate the inaction of the SWAT team by them not entering the location where action was taking place.

The second letter in the Columbine sample (*The Denver Post*, 1999b) is far more transparent in its criticism:

"The refusal of numerous metropolitan area police
departments and highly trained SWAT teams to
expeditiously rescue defenseless children trapped by two
gunmen in Columbine High School was the single greatest
act of cowardice I have ever witnessed."

Similar to the previous letter, the 'evaluative belief' (van Dijk 1998b) in the form of 'highly trained' buttresses the idea that the SWAT team had the *ability* to engage in actions: in this case, rescuing 'defenceless children' who were 'trapped,' suggesting: passiveness, helplessness and vulnerability. The SWAT team's inaction is described as 'the single greatest act of cowardice' by the letter writer: this is a form of 'evaluation' delegitimising these social actions and actors (Mayr and Machin 2012. The next part of the letter reveals *why* the letter-writer is so upset about this: they are the parent of two children who survived the Columbine shooting. Further personal information is provided about the letter writer: their father is a police officer so they have knowledge of that profession; and they were at the scene almost immediately after the shooting commenced, thus giving them an eyewitness perspective to events. A later sentence provided context:

> "I repeatedly asked police officers why the SWAT teams had
>
> not tried to take out the murderers and was told that they had
>
> found bombs and had to "secure" the school first."

The adverb 'repeatedly' suggests recurring actions; whilst the verb 'secure' in scare quotes[71] is used to challenge the social reality posed (Fairclough, 1995: 74), i.e. the writer thinks that this was just an excuse. The last comment in the letter is a form of 'intonation' (Parlmer 1976/1981), where the tone appears to be scathing and sardonic in nature: "If the police are not willing to put their lives on the line to protect the children in our community, they should go and sell shoes."

In *YouTube* discourses, blame for law enforcement was still evident: fourteen videos in the Columbine sample had comments pertaining to this, totalling eighty remarks; the Virginia Tech videos had a smaller spectrum with around eighteen comments spread across three videos.

In the case of Columbine, the main themes emerging were similar to those in letters. One of these was 'predicate' (Fowler 1991) where the delayed reaction affected teacher, Dave Sanders, in that he bled to death because of the delay. One *YouTube* commentator even said "Dave Sanders ran through the school trying to save people. He had more courage than all the cops put together." Applying the 'ideological square' (van Dijk 1998b) of 'Our Good Actions'/'Their Bad Actions' to this — with caution given Philo's (2007: 189) warning about becoming too reliant on a priori categories in analysis — Dave Sanders represents the 'Our' and the SWAT teams are the 'Their' in 'Their Bad Actions.' Notably, the 'Good Actions' that the SWAT members did do, like rescuing many other students, are excluded from the discussion and, in a couple of cases, were even replaced with claims that the surviving students saved *themselves* — this is an example of the blame attributions failing outside the constricted categories of Our/Their (for further information, see Philo 2007).

The fact the *YouTube* videos were of documentaries showing law enforcement moving through the building and setting up a perimeter outside meant that users accused law enforcement of "doing nothing" and "standing around," portraying them as deliberately *not*

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[71] Quotation marks are put around a term or phrase when there is "a blatant mismatch between apparent meaning and situational context" (Fairclough, 1992: 123) to signify this.

engaging in actions and the time period in which this occurred (three to four hours) was frequently referenced to further explicate this. Similar to the letters, references were made to the *ability* of those agents to act — thus 'delegitimising' their inactions (Mayr and Machin 2012) — with *YouTube* users pointing out the law enforcement officers had been trained to deal with such situations. Commentators used 'evaluative beliefs' (van Dijk 1998b) in the form of adjectives like 'scared,' 'terrified,' 'afraid' and 'cowardly' to surmise why the SWAT teams took so long to act. Already creeping into this discussion were remarks about law enforcement not being able to protect people and individuals would be better taking responsibility for their own safety by carrying 'protection' (i.e. a firearm). This sets the grounding for chapter nine, which will discuss *YouTube* users' lack of faith in both the ability and the obligation of law enforcement to protect them and show how this has encouraged the concealed carry on campus movement.

In the Virginia Tech *YouTube* sample, there were a number of comments in the video with live footage, showing the police not entering Norris Hall because of the doors being chained shut. Users seemed to be divided between comparing the law enforcement reaction at Virginia Tech to the one at Columbine and praising the former for acting expeditiously and bravely; and criticising the Virginia Tech law enforcement for standing outside — perhaps these users did not realise that the doors had been chained shut — and 'delegitimising' their inaction (Mayr and Machin 2012) by pointing to their equipment, weapons and ability to enter the building. There were only a few accusations that law enforcement caused the high death toll: "The police were like 'Let him [the shooter] empty his magazine [clip] on the students first'"; "How many lives could they have saved?"

6.3.2 Changes to Law Enforcement Tactics: Both Shootings

The confusion about building layout was something that hindered response to Columbine, so law enforcement tactical operations are now driven by knowledge about the environment in which a crisis is occurring: "The environment we are operating in is going to dictate our tactics: in our law enforcement we cannot have a cookie-cutter solution to our dilemma"-Sergeant AJ DeAndrea (*Arvada Police Department*). A useful technique, therefore, in preparing law enforcers for potential school shooting attacks is Jonescu's (in press) theory about 'tactical architecture,' predicated on interpreting public spaces and their links to behaviour, as an approach intended to aid operational policing. In order to

gain knowledge to facilitate police response, Jonescu (in press: page number tbc) advocates the importance of police visits to physical sites to look at things like escape routes, exit points, positioning of civilians. Relating this to schools, it could allow law enforcers to instruct staff and students of ways to optimise survival if a shooting were to take place. Another technique to specifically use on campus buildings is the 'tactical design' of buildings and artefacts in order to offer 'enfilade positions': a position of advantage to law enforcement. For this to be useful, the campus police force would be to be aware of the purpose of building design and ways to utilise this (Jonescu 2013).

Notably, school shootings tend to be homicide-suicides (see Newman *et al.* 2004), with 88% of school shooters attempting suicide in a self-harming method (as opposed to 'death-by-cop,' provoking law enforcement in an attempt to get them to fatally wound) after their attacks (Lankford 2013a). During an active shooter or hostage situation, the law enforcement rescue priorities have now changed: "The way we view the world: hostages, civilians, cop, suspect"-Sergeant AJ DeAndrea *Arvada Police Department*. He went on to explain that hostages being held against their will on the threat of violence and civilians in an active shooter situation are the priorities for rescuing; the lives of cops comes below this and the life of the suspect is the least important factor, since the important aspect is rescuing those in harm's way. Lankford (2013b) recommended that police officers should be trained to recognize which active shooters are intending to commit suicide either themselves or 'by cop' (i.e. provoking law enforcement to shoot them). The dangers of school shooting scenarios to some extent explains the 'militarisation' of police forces, where they adopt the cultural (values, styles) and organisational (tactics) aspects of the military (Kraska, 2007: 503).

Another more general problem, described by some of the law enforcement participants with whom the 'Report to the President' (2007) policy document (immediate, federal) authors spoke, was that students, campus officials and external police do not consider campus police to be 'full law enforcement.' The 'legitimacy' of police is important in convincing the public to trust their decisions and follow their orders (Tyler, 2-11: 255-256). It was, therefore, recommended by the 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) document (immediate, state) that mission statements of campus police should give precedence to their role as crime prevention officials. This brings to mind Shore and Wright's (1990: 4) theory that statuses are bestowed upon individuals through policy formulation. Concurrently, at *VTU*, the Safety and Security' policy clearly defined the

jurisdiction of campus police (*VTU*, 2012a: 4)

> "The *VTPD* is a full-service Nationally Accredited law
> enforcement agency empowered by the Code of Virginia to
> enforce federal, state and local laws, to make arrests, conduct
> criminal investigations, and perform other law enforcement
> activities. *VTPD* has the same authority as law enforcement
> agencies in the county and towns."

The police department also has the responsibility of enacting all security procedures and policies and approving building modifications (*VTU*, 2012a: 3-4). Rationalising and redefining the roles of police to deal with crime relates to what Garland (2001) calls the 'culture of crime control,' where government agencies alone — in this case, educational institutions — are not trusted to manage the risk. *VTU*'s Rescue Squad now also reports to the police department (*Virginia Tech*, 2008: 10), hence cementing their 'legitimacy' (Tyler 2011). An additional development was the 'Office of Emergency Management' and police and rescue departments have been amalgamated into the one facility (*VTU* n.d.).

On another note, the 'Report to the President' (2007) policy document (immediate, federal) noted that many campus police departments are under-staffed and lack critical resources. At *VTU*, funds of $487, 400 were appropriated by its executive vice president to employ eleven new members of staff in the campus police department. The police department currently has forty-nine officers, ten dispatchers, eight security guards and five support personnel (*VTPD* 2012). Equipment was also procured by the university: marked cars to increase visibility of police; uniforms for security guards; rifles for patrol officers (*VTU*, 2008: 11). Once again, this brings to mind 'militarism' where the weaponry of the military is utilised as a problem-solving tool (Kraska, 2007: 503). This is a tangible indicator of the institution 'doing something' (see Klocke and Muschert 2010; McRobbie 1994); despite the fact that *VTU* is unlikely to face a similar threat in the future.

Conclusion

This chapter centred on emergency management planning, training and responses. Although there was a critical dimension throughout this chapter, it could be said that the changes implemented after both shootings were actually useful in preparing for the very rare but potentially deadly school shooting attack. School shootings have therefore evoked responses to address current weaknesses threatening school safety and security, thus adhering to the requirements of a 'positive legacy' (see Altheide 2009; Cohen 2011).

Findings came from: commentary from the Columbine and Virginia Tech *YouTube* samples; news media discourse and letters from the Columbine sample; presentations at the 'School Safety Symposium' (2013), legislative bills from the *National Conference of State Legislatures*; analyses of policy documents in the Columbine and Virginia Tech samples; survey research taken from other studies.

Emergency management plans are a form of risk management (see, for instance, Coombs 2012; Heath *et al.* 2005; Sjoberg *et al.* 2005) seeking to avert a crisis and deal with one most effectively if it was to occur. Revisiting plans after incidents like school shootings help to improve emergency management planning by identifying current weaknesses (Heath *et al.*, 2009: 125). The state-level policy document identified flaws within the plan for *Columbine High School* at the time of the shooting, such as there being no mandate in place for a school shooting scenario. It is axiomatic that failing to identify a particular risk in emergency planning means there will be no strategy devised to deal with it (Coombs, 2012: 41). Following the recommendation of the state policy document, the school district in which *Columbine High* was located (Jefferson County, Colorado) updated its plan to reflect a variety of situations including school shootings. In a similar vein, legislation was implemented in Colorado, mandating such a plan for all school districts. The work of Furedi (2008, 2009) on 'possibilistic thinking' — focussing on worst-case scenarios — influencing policy-making seems of particular relevance here.

The Virginia Tech incident occurred in a post 9/11 context, so many schools, colleges and universities already had emergency management plans in place. The state policy document highlighted that the *Virginia Tech University* plan had been out-dated at the time of the shooting; plus, it failed to consider shooting scenarios and did not give authority to campus law enforcement to issue emergency alerts (more on this momentarily): this certainly supports the claim by Coombs (2012) that having plans in place can give a false sense of security. Policy document suggestions for emergency management revolved around: updating it regularly, establishing a hierarchy, expanding its range of scenarios,

and providing guidance on lockdown procedures. Looking at the most recent (2012) plan for *VTU* finds these suggestions have been incorporated. Survey research also showed that the shooting provoked other higher education institutions to develop or review their plans. State laws were implemented in Colorado and Virginia relating to improving emergency management plans.

Training for emergency management was then summarised. Policy documents in the Columbine sample advised that plans be rehearsed regularly. In Colorado, the *I Love U Guys Foundation* has developed the 'standard response protocol': a framework which can be used to train educators and students. Recommendations in both samples concentrate on training alongside first responders, something which was also highlighted as important in the 'School Safety Symposium' (2013).

Policy documents in the Virginia Tech sample acknowledged that 'lockdown' training procedures used for schools was neither really appropriate nor desirable for higher education institutions. The alternative was to recommend joint training between campus and local police forces and expanding the jurisdiction of campus law enforcement.

The final section examined the changes to law enforcement tactics following both shootings and the criticism of law enforcement response to the Columbine shooting in particular. I discovered that the news media tended towards exonerating law enforcement through their headlines and by using accounts from 'preferred' sources (Philo 2007) with 'established authority' due to their role (Tricson *et al.* 1989; Whitaker 1981). The tabloid papers *Daily News, New York Post* and *USA Today* in particular displayed this bias siding with law enforcement; although it was still prevalent in local paper *Denver Post* and national broadsheet *The Washington Post.* It was particularly surprisingly that the local paper *Denver Post* was reluctant to criticise law enforcement; yet it published the two letters that do so. By contrast, there was some tentative criticism of law enforcement present in local paper *Rocky Mountain News* and newsweekly *TIME.* This contradicts the finding of Elias (1993: 12) that newsweeklies, such as *TIME*, tend to treat police officers as 'heroes.'

In contrast, findings from *YouTube* discourse showed that users assigned responsibility to law enforcement for the high death toll at Columbine, accusing them of deliberately *not* engaging in actions and referring to them as 'cowardly' and 'scared.' This theme only appeared sporadically in Virginia Tech *YouTube* videos, with a number of users praising

law enforcement officers for their response to that shooting.

The changing tactics of law enforcement and advances in resources since both shootings were then discussed. In the Columbine policy sample, the federal-level document recommended that 'school resource officer' positions should be established. To that effect, federal funding was appropriated to allow for six hundred SRO positions in schools across the nation. Survey research documents, correspondingly, found that a number of schools took on SROs as a result of Columbine and other school shootings, and included SROs in emergency management planning. Both federal and state documents also mandated that since they are most likely to be the first responders at a crisis the jurisdiction of SROs — which is ambiguous at times, given the duality of their role as educators and law enforcement — be clearly defined. It also was found that law enforcement officers have changed their rescue priorities and training techniques. Jonescu's (2013; in press) 'tactical architecture' theory was suggested as a way to adhere tactical responses to building designs. The changes to the *VTU* police department to give them 'legitimacy' (Tyler 2011) as full law enforcement officials was related to the 'militarisation' of policing (Kraska 2007).

This chapter intended to show how the two case studies transformed emergency management planning and training in educational institutions, as well as law enforcement response. The next chapter will build upon this by examining how 'emergency communication' during crises was transformed by the Virginia Tech shooting and relating this once again to risk management literature.

7. Managing School Shootings: Crisis Communication

Introduction

The Virginia Tech shooting provoked a number of 'crisis' or 'emergency' communication measures being implemented in colleges and universities[72] and also led to changes in federal law. The impact of school shootings on emergency communication is something which has not really been documented by scholars (see Dumitriu 2013) and hence requires some exploration. The purpose of this chapter is to assess the discourses that led to a 'policy demand' (Anderson 2003) for emergency communication improvements. I then want to track the introduction/ amendment of legislative statutes and subsequent measures implemented relating to emergency communication (see appendix D for a list of key legislative changes).

Findings come from a number of sources: news media content and letters to the editor relating to criticism or exoneration of Virginia Tech University officials for the delay in communication on the day of the shooting; analyses of internal, state and federal policy documents[73]evinced the recommendations made; reviews of legislation from the *National Conference of State Legislators* and federal documents give an insight into subsequent developments; the assessment of an internal Virginia Tech 'discussion agenda' document shows how this was used to manage information after the shooting; my interview with the spokesperson from the *LiveSafe* mobile phone app about its emergency notification capabilities, as well as the documentation of crime data for higher education institutions.

My first area of inquiry is how the issue of emergency communication entered the governmental agenda as something requiring change (see Anderson 2003; Entman 2007; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Kingdon 1993/2004; Wondemaghen 2013). To do this, I firstly examined how weaknesses in current emergency communication systems were highlighted in state policy documents and reviews conducted by *Virginia Tech University* (*VTU*) itself. Moreover, attributions of blame and responsibility prevalent in news media and letters to the editor with regards to *VTU* officials for the delay in communication were analysed; the

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[72] This is something which has never really been an issue for K-12 schools, probably due to the smaller student populations and campus sizes.

[73] Similar to the previous chapter, when referring to a specific document, I will give an indication of the sample by putting the incident, time frame and level of decision-making: e.g. Virginia Tech policy document(immediate, state).

linguistic theories of Halliday (1994), van Dijk (1998b) and Van Leeuwen (1996) were employed here. Another area of interest is the public relations strategy used by *VTU*. Results are assessed using a relevant theoretical risk management and crisis communication framework (Beniot 1997; Coombs 2012; Heath *et al.* 2005; Power 2004).

This chapter is laid out accordingly to trace the development of crisis communication. First of all, I will outline the policy critique of actions taken by *VTU* officials on the day of the shooting and debates in news media and letters about whether those agents were responsible for the delay in communication; I will also look at the subsequent lawsuit filed against *VTU*. Following that, the recommendations and changes made to improve emergency notification on the federal, state and internal levels will be documented here. To finish off, the management of reputations via public relations' strategies after crises is reviewed.

7.1. *The Virginia Tech Shooting: Blaming University Officials*

The issue of emergency communication was something that only applied to the Virginia Tech case study because of the differences in student populations and campus sizes between schools and higher education institutions, where the latter is considerably larger in both regards. Columbine also occurred at a moment in time when mobile phone usage, particularly amongst the younger generation, was still relatively rare. As the previous chapter outlined, Columbine did provoke criticism of authorities, but on that occasion it was directed at law enforcement for their response to the shooting.

This section will outline the mistakes *VTU* are said to have made on the day of the shooting with regards to emergency communication and the weaknesses of their existing system. The criticisms of *VTU* officials within a policy document are discussed. Outlined thereafter is the debate in the news media and letters to the editor about whether the university officials were 'responsible' for the delay in emergency communication. Lastly, the lawsuit which resulted from these criticisms is discussed.

7.1.1 *Policy Document Critiques*

The 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) policy document (immediate, state)[74]maintained that *VTU* erred in a number of decisions it made the day of the shooting (April 16th 2007) and that its emergency alerts system was flawed. The advice here is attributing responsibility to a *lack* of certain elements and relates to the *resolution* of an issue through a specific process adhering to the final components of the 'problem frame' (Altheide 1997).

One of the major problems highlighted by *VTRP* (2007/2009) was there were inconsistencies between the emergency communication policy, which listed the *Policy Group* (*VTPG*) and *Police Department* (*VTPD*) as being authorised parties for releasing emergency alerts, and the emergency management plan, which denoted that the *VTPD*, despite having the authority to develop or request an alert, had to wait for the *VTPG* to deliberate and then approve or reject the request. The latter option of the emergency management plan was the one followed on April 16th, as campus police did not possess the computer code needed to issue an emergency message campus-wide.

The *VTPD* also contributed to the errors made that day: it urged the *Policy Group* to be cautious, but failed to advise them of any concrete actions to take, such as the immediate cancellation of classes. Campus police prematurely believed that the first shooting incident at 'West Ambler Johnstone' dorm was an isolated attack based on a domestic dispute and identified that the murdered student's boyfriend as the main 'person of interest' in the murder investigation; further to this, the *VTPD* inferred that the shooter was off-campus and hence was no longer a threat.

Another problem was there were no templates of messages for different scenarios when such a measure would have allowed for a more expeditious process of sending alerts. As discussed in the previous chapter, the emergency management plans — and thus the alerts available — prior to the shooting centred on natural disasters (weather problems and fires) and, existing in a post 9/11 world, acts of terrorism. Surprisingly, despite occurring in a post-Columbine context, there were no provisions in place for a school shooting scenario — this could perhaps be attributable to the fact that most school shootings at that point in time had occurred in middle and high schools rather than colleges and universities.

As it happened, the content of the emergency notification sent to staff and students at 9:26am was not very specific or urgent in its warnings:

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[74] Two versions were published, with the 2009 edition consisting of corrections and additions to the original 2007 edition.

A shooting incident occurred at West Ambler Johnston [dorm] earlier this morning. Police are on the scene and are investigating. The university community is urged to be cautious and are asked to contact Virginia Tech Police if you observe anything suspicious or with information on the case. Contact Virginia Tech Police at 231–6411. Stay tuned to the [webpage] www.vt.edu. We will post as soon as we have more information (as cited in *Virginia Tech Review Panel*, 2009: 82).

The 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) investigators concluded that if the emergency alert had been more urgent or advised specific actions, this could have alerted more people to suspicious activities and hence enhanced their chances of survival. The second message sent at 9:50am was more specific and direct: "A gunman is loose on campus. Stay in buildings until further notice. Stay away from all windows" (as cited in *Virginia Tech Review Panel*, 2009: 96).

It could be argued that the most severe mistake was the delay in sending the message. In the Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) policy document, a timeline of events shows that, after the initial dorm shooting, the university engaged in actions such as locking down its *Center for Professional and Continuing Education* and cancelling bank deposits for that day. Moreover, at 8:45am, a member of the Policy Group emailed a colleague in Richmond stating "Gunman on the loose. This is not releasable yet" and, at 8:49am, sent another one saying "just try to make sure it doesn't get out." Schools in nearby Blacksburg went into lockdown at 8:52am. Despite this, the first alert to students and staff at Virginia Tech went through at 9:26am, twenty-one minutes after the first period started; although a technical error caused a fifteen minute delay so the message was actually sent at about 9:10am. The 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) authors surmised that had the message been released before 8:30am, this could have been received by most students and staff before they left for the first class of the day; by contrast, many would already be in class or walking to class at 9:26am and thus unlikely to have the opportunity or even the need to check their email accounts. Overall, the 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) authors came to the conclusion that the high death toll is attributable to the delay in communication and that the *VTU* Policy Group and, to a lesser extent, the Police Department, are responsible for this.

Noticeably, the other policy documents in the Virginia Tech sample (immediate, internal) referring to emergency communication were the 'Security Infrastructure' and

'Communication' reviews conducted by *VTU*. Within these reviews, there were no criticisms of any decisions taken that day by the Policy Group and Police Department, or of the policies in place, such as the inconsistencies between the emergency communication policy and the emergency management plan. The 'Security Infrastructure' report (immediate, internal) noted that only four of the six mass notification speaker systems throughout campus had been installed at the time of the shooting; hence portraying the weakness as being the provisions at the time of the shooting. Likewise, the 'Communications Infrastructure' review (immediate, internal) listed the seven methods of emergency communication in place at the time of the shooting, all of which were used that day (more on these later); a suggestion is made about an alternative method, if technology failed, of officials walking round and knocking on doors to warn people.

The *VTU* reviews are, therefore, setting up the 'problem' as shortcomings of technology and the 'resolution' being to upgrade these, as well as use non-technological methods as a back-up to relay emergency messages (Altheide 1997). Witte *et al.*'s (2000) theory that an effective form of persuasion is the 'problem-solution' message seems particularly applicable here: the additional speaker systems and the door-to-door notifications are being portrayed as the 'changed conditions' needed to 'alleviate the threat' of being unable to relay emergency messages to students and staff. To clarify, instead of focusing on the reasons *why* the mistake occurred — flawed policies, delay in decision-making, the *VTPD*'s error in assuming the shooter was no longer on campus — the internal reviews instead portray the problem as shortcomings in technology; therefore, setting up a viable and concrete 'answer' to the problem which can be addressed by advancing current equipment and communication strategies. Such an approach brings to mind the theory of Powers (2004) that institutions purposefully select 'risks' to be managed.

7.1.2 Media and Public Response

Evident throughout the Virginia Tech news media sample was criticism of *VTU* for the delay in communication on the day of the shooting. Philo (2008: 540) made the point that "how actions are perceived and the legitimacy of different positions can be dramatically affected by the context in which they are understood and the information which is given." The details provided in the news media, coupled with this occurring within the context of

the 'worst school shooting' (refer back to chapter five for a reminder of this), can influence how the audience comes to interpret the actions of university officials and other key actors. Notably, missing from new media content and letters were references to the *positive* actions that university officials took that day, such as warning students not to come to campus when the shooting situation had yet to be resolved.

Evident in news media content were 'discursive storylines' serving to condense information and position social actors in on-going narratives (Fischer, 2003: 86-87). An example of this is the *New York Post* (April 2007) expressing its opinion quite vehemently with the headline 'UNFORGIVABLE' and accusing university officials of "lax behaviour" and making a "grievous, horrific mistake — that cost 32 people their lives." Similarly, a *USA Today* (April 2007) article had the headline "With a killer on loose, classes stayed in session; Alert came 2 hours after initial slayings," adding considerable melodrama and sensationalism to the issue as per moral panic definitions (see Cohen 1972/2002; Klocke and Muschert 2010). These tabloid papers are known for being populist tabloids with shorter articles and more graphics, so it is perhaps unsurprisingly they adopted the snappy, dramatic style documented by Altheide (2002b). Similarly, *TIME* magazine (April 2007) described the university reaction as "tragically misguided" and the email warnings as "too little, too late." Quotations from parents, whose children were killed or wounded, expressing anger, outrage and frustration, added to this feeling. Joseph Samaha, whose daughter, Reema, was killed, questioned why university administrators did not take any immediate action: "Why didn't they cancel classes then? Nobody would have been on campus" (quoted in *Richmond Times Dispatch,* September 2008).

A number of letters in the sample backed up this sentiment. A *USA Today* letter (June 2009) described the delay at Virginia Tech was "unacceptable." A different writer (*USA Today*, September 2007) accused the *VTU* officials of a 'complete lack of judgment.' The letter goes on to state: "The excuses of time restraints and avoiding panic on the campus ring hollow…Virginia Tech President Charles Steger should have acknowledged blame instead of hiding behind it," with the terms 'excuses' and 'ring hollow' and 'hiding behind it [blame]' giving the impression of the university failing to admit responsibility. Using the lexical technique of expressing an opinion about an opinion — known as a 'meta-opinion' (see van Dijk 1998b) — a *Roanoke Times* letter-writer discredits the newspaper's defence of the Virginia Tech administration as "feeble" and "outrageous." The writer also claimed that the university officials are 'doomed' to make similar mistakes in future, because they have not admitted culpability for their actions. The letter writer's status is listed as 'former

assistant professor, *VTU*,' giving an indication of the writer's personal connection to this issue.

On another note, the president seemed to be a 'figurehead' encompassing all notions of responsibility and blame for the delay in communication that day. A *Richmond Times Dispatch* (March 2009) article described the university president, Charles Steger, as an "incompetent leader" and thus called for him to be fired: "Steger needs to be held accountable; he needs to go." Further exemplifying the notion of individual responsibility was a *Roanoke Times* (March 2012) feature article written by the parents of a girl killed and who were filing a lawsuit: "It was Steger whom we sought to hold personally accountable by our lawsuit, but Virginia law didn't permit us to do that." So, blame is being placed squarely onto an individual for what they are said to have *failed* to do rather than the institution of *VTU* itself.

Counteracting criticisms made throughout the Virginia Tech news media sample were the university officials' 'accounts': statements used to explain behaviour when it is questioned (Coombs, 2012: 154). The university president claimed that a lockdown was not feasible on campus and there had been concerns that allowing students outside could leave them even more vulnerable to a shooting attack (*New York Times*, August 2007; *Newsweek,* April 2007; *Washington Post*, May 2007). The chief of the *VTPD* stated that there was no reason to suspect that anything else was going to transpire after the initial shootings in the dorm (*New York Times*, April 2007; *Newsweek,* April 2007; *USA Today*, April 2007). These justifications from university officials bring to mind the 'culture of defensiveness' predicated on managing risks to institutional reputation (Power, 2004: 14, 20). In this case, it is claimed that a lack of information about the situation meant they did all they *could* do. It could, therefore, be argued that university officials used the 'image repair' technique of 'defeasibility' to counteract criticism, as this portrays a situation as out with the organisation's power to manage intending for responsibility upon the organisation to be alleviated (Benoit, 1997: 179-180, 186).

Surprisingly, perhaps, there were some letters to the editor in the sample *defending* the Virginia Tech administration. One writer exonerates them from blame completely: "the Tech administration is not to blame for Cho's crime. They reacted reasonably given what they knew at the time" (*Newsweek*, May 2007). A different letter makes a similar argument:

> It is easy to look back and say "what if" or "should have,"
> but I believe all the Tech officials made the correct call at the
> time with the information they had available (*The Roanoke
> Times,* April 2007).

The letter is drawing upon logos (appeals to logic and reason) by saying the administration only had access to a limited amount of information at that time, although it does not account for the delay in communication.

Another writer raises a hypothetical scenario of the perpetrator shooting at people from rooftops — similar to the 1966 Austin, Texas College shooting— if classes had been cancelled:

> It is difficult to comprehend why some critics of Virginia
> Tech President Charles W. Steger continue to argue that he
> should have locked down the university or at least canceled
> classes after learning of the presence of a killer on campus
> early on the morning of April 16. Many students would have
> returned to their dormitories, only to be shot at along the
> way, and we would be hearing condemnations of the
> university president for canceling classes (*Washington Post,*
> 31 August 2007).

This is all just speculation, of course, because there is no proof that this would have happened. The point the writer is trying to make, however, is that criticism will come regardless of what pre-emptive action was taken to negate it.

Overall, the majority of news media discourse in the sample and a number of letters blamed *VTU*, particularly its president, for the delay in communication; a number of letters justifying the actions of the administration and president, however, showed that 'reactions' to the shooting were not unanimous. There were no references to it in *YouTube* video samples.

7.1.3 Lawsuit

The delay in communication on April 16th 2007 was said to violate the 'Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act' — commonly known as the 'Clery Act'[75] — (1991), codified at 20 U.S.C.§ 1092, applying to all colleges and universities that participate in federal financial aid programs. More specially, the 'Clery Act' (1991) requires that higher education institutions provide 'timely warnings' in emergency situations posing a threat to students and staff (Sokolow *et al.*, 2008: 344). This law is named for university student, Jeanne Clery, who was raped and murdered in her dorm room in 1986. The purpose of the law, when enacted in 1991, was for transparency around crimes occurring on colleges and universities by keeping a public crime log, publishing an annual crime report and disclosing security policies (*Security on Campus* n.d.).

Violating that part of the law resulted in the university being fined fifty-five thousand dollars by the *U.S. Department of Education* (*ABC News* 2012). *VTU* appealed this fine, insisting that it made the best decisions possible with the information available at the time and their own institutional policy defined forty-eight hours as an appropriate time frame to relay emergency notifications (*Richmond Times Dispatch*, 16 April 2011; *USA Today*, 30 March 2011). The defensiveness of the university fits with the 'implicatory denial' model described by Cohen (2000, 2011) focusing on a *deliberate* silence or evasion that attempts to justify actions. Complicating matters was the fact that 'timely warnings' were *not* clearly defined at the time of Virginia Tech shooting and so this meant the time frame was a bit ambiguous. It was decided in early 2012 that the fine should be overturned. A few months later, however, this fine was partially reinstated to $27, 500 (Simon 2012).

The parents of two students killed also brought a case against the university in 2012 arguing that their daughters may have survived if communication had been more prompt (Kim 2012). Feelings of injustice and helplessness tend to motivate the need to attribute responsibility and causation to a particular person or institution (Montada, 1993: 85). In this case, it would be an example of 'administrative inefficacy' where the officials of the institution are deemed to be responsible for the severity of the crime (Elias, 1986: 78) because of the delay in communication. Studying case law finds that there exists a 'special relationship' obligating higher institutions to have an appropriate level of security to guarantee the safety of students (see Burling 2003; Sokolow *et al.* 2008), so there would be

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[75] It will be referred to as the 'Clery Act' (1991) from now on.

some grounds for a lawsuit. Since state-level 'Tort Claims' law provides sovereign immunity to institutions, the *VTU* lawsuit was filed against the Commonwealth of Virginia for a maximum of a hundred thousand dollars (Sokolow*et al.*, 2008: 340). In the end, the jury found the university negligent and the two families were awarded damages (Kim 2012).

7.1.4 *Managing Post-Incident Reputations*

A reputation is an institutional asset or deficiency, since it is an evaluation which stakeholders — persons who have a claim, interest or ownership in an organisation — make about institutions (Coombs, 2012: 35, 37). Beniot (1997: 178) has described an 'attack' on reputation as occurring when the organisation is believed to be responsible for an offensive act. Relating this to school shootings finds that this is something of particular concern to institutions. The period which follows incidents is a critical time for post-hoc analysis of causes and blame to be attributed (Heath *et al.*,2009: 125). This is generally known as 'post-crisis communication' and has its roots in public relations, attempting to both manage and frame public perceptions of an event in an attempt to protect the organisation from damage (Reynolds and Seeger, 2005: 46, 50). It is recommended that a strategy of designing post-crisis messages can be used to negate the damage done to an organisation's reputation (Benoit, 1997: 182).

This is something which came up in the internal *VTU* document the 'Discussion Agenda' devised post-incident (retrieved from *Collegiate Times* 2008). This document follows a public relations strategy similar to 'image repair' theory (Beniot 1997), with their 'plan' being to "own the messages; frame the context and expression of the messages; control the language of the messages; control the outlet of the messages." Advice is given to staff on how to manage information, with areas to avoid talking about being listed: the shooter's interaction with faculty and mental health record, improving emergency communication systems, the university's role in screening students for mental health problems and providing counselling. Encouraged to be discussed are topics which show actions in positive and progressive thinking: 'Hokie spirit' and sense of family; the character and poise of students; the institution's strong academic reputation; existing policy and procedures. This adheres to Pettit's (2007: 6) advice to work out several *visible* means of reassurance that "signal recovery and confidence with regard to future campus

safety."

Driving these sentiments is the fact that 'reputation' is a rational and self-interested risk management asset and one which is threatened by crises (Heath *et al.*, 2009: 125; Power, 2004: 34-35). As an oblique risk outside the control of the company, it is difficult to foresee reputational damage (Borghesi and Gaudenzi, 2013: 19). Accountability of institutions is driving this trend and has led to the management of the 'perceived legitimacy' of regulatory actions and decisions (Power, 2004: 14, 20).

In terms of higher educational institutions more generally, post-crisis public relations strategies are discussed in an *American Association of Colleges and Universities* report. It is claimed that the importance of public relations centres on the idea that "the public do not trade in nuance" (Pettit 2007: 5) and would hold state governors accountable for incidents occurring in state universities. It is, therefore, recommended that university presidents ask the governor how to handle post-crisis information. This is suggesting that governmental involvement in shaping information conveyed to the news media — itself a secondary stakeholder (see Coombs, 2012: 38) — and how an image is maintained is of key importance here.

7.2 Emergency Communication Improvements[76]

7.2.1 Federal and State Level Recommendations & Changes

Recommendations to improve emergency communication were evident in most of the Virginia Tech policy sample. There was the presence of a 'something must be done about it' mind-set indicative of a moral panic (McRobbie 1994). The 'Report to the President' (2007) policy document (immediate, federal) referred to emergency communication only in abstract stating a clear plan and mechanism should be developed to communicate with students and their parents in a crisis. The 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' (2007/2009) report (immediate, state) had the more concrete advice that federal law define what 'timely'

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[76] Recommendations relating to emergency communication have been divided by federal and state level changes and then internal ones to Virginia Tech University. This breaks down the process by institutional policy-making in the case of the University and state and federal governments.

means in the 'timely warnings' component of the federal-level 'Clery Act' (1991). Other advice in the federal and state policy sample centred on: having multiple ways of sending emergency messages, including ones not reliant on technology; giving law enforcement and administration officials the authority to send emergency alerts to speed up the process; the content of messages themselves should be explicit and clear.

Legislative changes at the federal and state levels followed the policy recommendations quite closely. The federal-level 'Clery Act' (1991) was amended in 2008 to include changes to emergency communication: notification is now required to be immediate, unless to do so would impede efforts to resolve the situation somehow; notification methods are to be publicised to staff and students, plus tested and annually reported; the authority of campus law enforcement to issue emergency messages is to be clearly defined in institutional policies (*Security on Campus* 2008). The Virginia state bill 'First warning and emergency notification system,' codified at § 23-9.2:11 (2008, cc. 413, 450) and implemented in 2008, mandated that emergency notification for public institutions of higher education be 'comprehensive prompt, and reliable,' with various communication mechanisms and the appointment of authorised, trained individuals to activate systems.

In terms of measurable effects, research conducted by *Campus Safety Magazine* found that, a year after Virginia Tech, 73% of survey respondents had bought or intended to purchase mass emergency notification systems (Gray, 2008: 21). A survey[77] by Rasmussen and Johnson (2008) found that 75% of respondents intended to incorporate mobile phone technology in their systems after the Virginia Tech shooting, compared to the 5% who had it in place prior to the incident. A nation-wide survey conducted by *Campus Safety Magazine* (Gray 2011) found that the top three categories of persons with the authority to issue emergency notifications were: security directors (54%), president/vice-president (48/44%), and police chiefs (39%).[78] This shows the 'institutionalisation' of the movement with new forms of governance (Klocke and Muschert, 2010: 11, 13).

7.2.2 *Virginia Tech University Recommendations & Changes*

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[77]A nation-wide survey was conducted during a two week period in March 2008 of student life officers and campus safety directors to assess Virginia Tech in terms of campus safety, security policy and practice. Total sample of 331 participants was used. Institutions in the West were underrepresented in sample. Sample: Rural 39%, urban 34%, suburban 29%.

[78] Results come from the *Campus Safety Magazine* 2010 Mass Notification Survey. No exact details of this survey appear to be publicly available.

Taking a social constructionist approach to analysing policy acknowledges that the so-called 'facts' of each side are rooted in social realities (Fisher, 2003: 129). To this effect, the argument Power (2004: 38) makes about institutional responses being guided by "cultural demands for control, accountability and responsibility attribution" seems particularly relevant in the need to 'take action' after the Virginia Tech shooting and subsequent lawsuit. *VTU* policy documents (immediate, internal) went into more specific detail about changes needing made: installing LCD message boards, sirens and flashing lights; crafting templates for emergency messages; creating an electronic 'people locator' system for users to log onto and 'check in'; develop a secure way for visitors to the campus to receive alerts and check the network for updates; having a multi-tiered communication system of email, IM, radio, cable TV, web-postings, RSS feeds, public addresses. The advice of the 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' policy document (immediate, state) was written into the institutional policies of *VTU*: recipients of the alert are urged to inform each other; multiple means of sharing information; campus police and administration officials have the authority to send emergency notifications (*VTU*, 2008: 6-7). In the case of *VTU* policies, the recommendations made in internal reviews are based on the 'image restoration' technique of 'corrective action' (see Beniot, 1997: 184): the university sought to repair its image by reporting plans to improve its emergency communication system.

Looking at internal documentation allows for the physical infrastructure changes at *VTU* relating to emergency notification to be tracked. In terms of improving mobile phone signals in buildings on campus, service providers sent over technicians to improve tower capacity. Sirens were also installed at two additional locations throughout the campus. Most notably, at the time of the shooting, *VTU* was in the process of updating the notification system, but the event — and perhaps the accompanying controversy and lawsuits about the delay in emergency communication— meant the process was expedited and so 'VT Phone Alerts' was fully installed and configured by July 2007. This system allows for users to either opt-in or out of subscribing to the system. Those opting in choose three contact methods ranked in order of preference: text messages, instant messages, emails (including non-university addresses), phone calls to office/residence, phone call to mobile phones, and phone calls to elsewhere (e.g. parents' numbers). At the time of August 2007, almost eleven thousand students, faculty and staff had subscribed to the 'VT Phone Alerts' system.

Further changes have been implemented since then. In 2008, digital signs linking with the 'VT Phone Alerts' system were added to classrooms; the year of 2009 saw the introduction of the 'VT Desktops Alerts' system sending a message to laptops/computers connected to the internet, both on and off campus; the system was expanded to six regions in Virginia in 2010. The most recent notification system consists of contacting mobile phones, telephones and instant messaging supplements, other systems of emails, desktop alerts sirens/loudspeakers, hotline, website, electronic message boards (*VTU*, 2011: 2, 5-6). Under these circumstances, policies have a 'legitimising' function outlining the course of action needed to fix the problem and the implementation of these gives authority to the decision-making body (Shore and Wright, 1990: 11).

7.2.3 LiveSafe: The Transformation of Emergency Communication

The *LiveSafe* app addresses some of the recommendations made in the policy documents discussed so far. The presence of such an app adheres to the 'transformation' aspect of the moral panic (Klocke and Muschert 2010), where a gap in the market has been created for such a product. Adhering to one of the suggestions of a *VTU* review, it has a 'broadcast tab' feature that allows users to send messages (text, email or voice) to all other subscribers, with pre-set templates to save time — this was described as "another layer of mass [emergency] notification for schools"–*LiveSafe* representative. There is no denying that, in contemporary societies like the United States, a 'convergence culture' (Jenkins 2006) is evident: this refers to traditional (i.e. newspapers, television, broadcasting, telephone calls, radio) and new media (i.e. internet-based and/or mobile phone technologies) industries collaborating together, content being transmitted vis-à-vis various formats, and audiences fluctuating between them. Jenkins (2006: 6) also argued that this culture has evolved to one which incorporates both traditional and new media formats, allowing them to interact with each other in various ways.

In the case of *LiveSafe*, the 'map' feature (see figure 13 below) can be seen by all subscribers. Incidents such as shooting incidents, fires and car accidents are initially reported through the 'dashboard' feature (see figure 14 below) and show up on the computers of affiliated law enforcement organisations allowing them to investigate incidents:

"On a feed on the left, incidents are coming in and you have

all these different items, so you click on it and it kind of

opens up and shows you the information, any picture, audio"

–*LiveSafe* representative.

Once the police have verified an incident is correct, it shows up on its 'map' feature and this data is amalgamated for each higher education institution. The federal legislation 'Clery Act' (1991) requires higher education institutions to log and publicise information about crimes committed on or near campuses in an annual crime report (Sokolow *et al.*, 2008: 344). The *LiveSafe* spokesperson made a case for attention being drawn to any crime or safety problems on campuses: "My view is, well, that's what is happening anyway, so please tell people and be transparent and now they have more reason to be cautious." Such a sentiment adheres to Slovic's (1987: 285) call for action that the 'hidden agendas' of risk concerns need to be aired and discussed.

Figure 13: Map Feature of *LiveSafe.*[79]

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[79] This image was taken from a screenshot during the *YouTube* video (2013a) 'LiveSafe: The Social Safety Network…Explained,' 8 May. *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmO7cufCWxM.*

Figure 14: Newsfeed feature of *LiveSafe*.[80]

Furthermore, the traditional format of 'broadcasting' emergency alerts combines with smartphone technology in *LiveSafe* to allow individuals to take control of both sending and receiving crisis communication messages. This application also allows users to 'check in' during a crisis, providing them with an alternative to the traditional media format of making a telephone call:

> "When there's a mass tragedy you can't make phone calls
> easily...if it's data, it will eventually get there and the
> 'location tab' broadcasts your location to certain contacts, so
> you can set like 'mom, dad, sister, brother' and you can send
> them a note that says 'I'm safe' and that has your location
> too, so they know where to come get you"-*LiveSafe*
> representative.

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[80] This was a screenshot taken from the *YouTube* video (2013b) 'Shooting victim creates app to save lives,' 19 April. *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmO7cufCWxM.*

It also has a feature 'call police (911)' or 'message police,' which potentially be used in emergency situations where "you want to be discrete or you're hiding. And it [the dashboard] starts tracking you when you message too" –*LiveSafe* representative. The app, however, is only to be used to contact emergency services under circumstances where there are no other options.[81] Possibly it could also be used by users who are unable to call the police, because of language barriers (*LiveSafe* translates tips submitted in non-English languages) and disabilities, such as being mute.

The *LiveSafe* app allowing for communication during a crisis and an alternative form of emergency calling could potentially fall under the rubric of 'functional fear' where insecurity about the risk of crime can be managed through taking precautions (Jackson and Gray 2010). Something discussed in the chapter five 'Terror' sub-section was that during the Virginia Tech shooting many students had to 'play dead' to survive, so an inconspicuous way to communicate with emergency services would have been very useful under those circumstances. The alternative point of view could be that the *presence* of such an app could result in a distorted sense of risk: for instance, Bauman (2006, 2007) and Gabriel and Greve (2003) have maintained that measures put in place to reassure people could counterproductively increase fear. Solomon (2006: 29) claimed that the absent of fear would mean "we would allow ourselves to be vulnerable to all sorts of dangers." For that reason, it has been argued that fear can be constructive under *certain circumstances* by motivating essential action on a particular risk (Gardner, 2008: 6; emphasis added).

The representative of *LiveSafe*, however, thought that making safety a more natural and everyday entity could negate fear levels:

> "I don't think people really think about safety until
> something happens and then they're more conscious, but if
> you made it more of a natural dialogue of our lives, you'd be
> like 'Oh, hey. They're looking for this guy in this corner' or
> 'I should be more aware.' Taking precautions to lower our
> sense of fear..."

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[81] For liability reasons, the app has a disclaimer that it is for non-emergencies; but it could possibly be used in a situation where there are no other options; however, this would be on the understanding that *LiveSafe* is not to be held accountable should the message fail to reach the police in time.

Given the findings of Gray *et al.* (2011) and Jackson and Gray (2010) that precautionary action, such as being more aware and having tools to reduce victimisation, can negate anxiety about crime, it certainly seems that 'naturalising' safety to make it a commonplace occurrence could be useful in managing fear. Perhaps the only exceptions to this could be the rare instances where people suffer from intense and regular episodes of fear in a state of 'dysfunctional worry' (Farrall *et al.* 2009; Gray *et al.* 2011) about school shootings and other crimes; under those circumstances, such an app could possibly add to their anxieties.

Conclusion

This chapter has documented the recommendations and changes made with regards to emergency communication following the Virginia Tech shooting. Assessments of policy documents from federal, state and *VTU* sources revealed the weaknesses in emergency communication systems at the time of the shooting and the advice that was provided. Tracing legislative action revealed there was impact on both state and federal laws. Survey research and other developments in the area give some indication of the measurable effects throughout higher education institutions. Literature in risk management and crisis communication allowed for a critical appraisal of processes undertaken.

The actions of *Virginia Tech University* on the day of the shooting — sending out an alert two hours after the first shooting; the content of the message being vague; not taking any concrete actions like locking down the campus —were critiqued in the 'Virginia Tech Review Panel' policy document. The same document also maintained there were inconsistencies between the emergency management plan and the emergency communication policies in place. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, internal *VTU* reviews did not criticise any decisions made that day and instead attributed blame to elements of their emergency notification system being missing and they also made suggestions for improvement: face-to-face notifications to cope with technology failing and installing more sirens on campus. This fits the requirements of Altheide's (1997) 'problem frame' because it presents a known 'solution' and 'processes' to the problem at hand.

Similarly, in news media content and letters to the editor — although not *YouTube* content, where the issue was not raised at all — there was strong criticism of *Virginia Tech University* officials. Contrasting from their siding with law enforcement in the case of Columbine, the tabloids *New York Post* and *USA Today* displayed strong criticism of *VTU* officials; newsweekly *TIME* and the local papers *Roanoke Times* and *Richmond Times Dispatch* also demonstrated some criticism. The university president and chief of campus police used the 'image repair' technique of 'defeasibility' (see Benoit 1997) to counteract criticism, claiming that a lack of information about the situation meant they did all they *could* do at the time. These counter-voices were present in the national broadsheets *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and newsweekly *Newsweek*: all these sources score highly on the left-leaning scale (Groseclose and Milyo 2005). Moreover, the local papers *Roanoke Times* and *Richmond Times Dispatch* had the greatest number of critical letters to the editor; this is to be expected because of the 'cultural proximity' (Galtung and Ruge 1965) of the issue to their readers. Correspondingly, *Washington Post* and *Newsweek* printed letters defending the *VTU* officials.

Despite this conflict in the debate, the delay resulted in a substantial fine from the *U.S. Department of Education* for violating the 'Clery Act' (1991) and lawsuits from parents of students killed. As mentioned earlier, reputation is a valuable asset for institutions and keeping it intact has incrfeasingly become the focal point of 'secondary risk management' (Coombs 2012; Power 2004). An attack on reputation is an oblique risk that is difficult to prepare for (Borghesi and Gaudenzi 2013; Heath *et al.* 2009) and generally requires 'image repair' theory to mend it post-crisis (Beniot 1997). Discussed thereafter was the importance of 'managing reputations' (Power 2004) post-incident was outlined by drawing upon relevant literature (Coombs 2012; Heath *et al.* 2009; Reynolds and Seeger, 2005). An internal document from *VTU*, outlining the 'Discussion Agenda' after the incident, was analysed and related to 'image repair' (Benoit 1997) and public relations (Pettit 2007) strategies. A more transparent system of managing risk (Powers 2004) could remove such 'hidden agendas' of risk concern (Slovic 1987). For higher education institutions, this would mean being open about the crimes occurring on their campuses — this is something the *LiveSafe* app's map function may be able to help with.

The legislative impact from the Virginia Tech shooting was notable. The recommendation from the state-level *VTRP* policy document was to define 'timely' in the federal legislation 'Clery Act' (1991) — this was particularly relevant since this was

commonly contested in *VTU*'s counterchallenge to the fine imposed on them for supposedly violating that law. This law was subsequently amended in 2008; in the same year, the state of Virginia implemented legislation requiring 'comprehensive, prompt and reliable' emergency notification systems in all higher and further education institutes. The crisis appeared to 'resonate' with higher education institutions and led to a 'transformation' in the institutional processes of emergency communication (Klocke and Muschert 2010), something which survey research (Gray 2008; *Campus Safety Magazine* 2011) documented. Internal *VTU* policy documents made specific, detailed recommendations: this fits with the 'image restoration' strategy of 'corrective action' (see Benoit 1997) highlighting ways to resolve the issue. The university's emergency alerts system was updated, expanded and physical hardware improved, which was a notable 'transformation' in institutional policies (Klocke and Muschert 2010).

In a similar vein, the *LiveSafe* mobile phone app converges 'old' and 'new' media forms (Jenkins 2006) to allow a transformation of communication in an emergency situation. It was theorised that this could create 'functional fear' (Jackson and Gray 2010) where people who are concerned about crime feel using the app is a form of precautionary action. The only exception to this would be where it could work counterproductively to increase fear; this is likely to occur when people suffer from 'dysfunctional worry' about crime (Farrall *et al.* 2009; Gray *et al.* 2011).

Overall, the Virginia Tech shooting occurred alongside the emergence of a 'convergence culture' (Jenkins 2006), so the advancements in technology paved the way for the reconceptualisation of how emergency communication is understood and managed. Further, apps like *LiveSafe* allow for improved transparency of incidents occurring at higher education institutions and offers provisions to aid communication with emergency services and personal contacts during and following a crisis like a school shooting. This is something which is likely to develop in future as technology advances and educational institutions seek for ways to improve emergency communication.

This chapter sought to demonstrate the impact of the Virginia Tech shooting on how emergency communication is legitimised and managed. It also signals the end of the 'Fear and Managing Risk' section. The next section 'Gun-Related Sentiment and Action' will

develop some of the themes mentioned already, markedly the role of fear in provoking social movements and the formation of policy.'

PART THREE: GUN-RELATED SENTIMENT AND ACTIONS

8. Introduction to Part Three: The History and Politics of Gun Legislation in the U.S.

> *"A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."-Second Amendment, U.S. Constitution[82]*

Introduction

The purpose of this introductory section is to set the context of gun legislation, which lays the foundations for the data analysis findings in chapters nine, ten and eleven within part three. Examined here are key policy-making actors in the United States, with a particular focus on the role of interest groups; I thereafter delve into historical and current developments of the politics of gun legislation in the United States. As this is a complex issue to cover, my focus has been narrowed to the most salient aspects: the passage of major federal gun laws, some of which re-emerge in the suggestions made by interviewees in chapter ten.; the two main bodies of thought 'individual rights' and 'states rights' around the second amendment; the 2008 and 2010 Supreme Court rulings that set some constitutional parameters on gun regulation; an overview of the 'concealed carry on campus movement.'

8.1. Policy-Making in the U.S.: Political Actors and Interest Groups

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[82] Since the second amendment is the foundation of the highly politicised and divisive debates about guns in the U.S., it was deemed necessary to cite here. See, for example, Cornell 2006; Malcolm 1994; Williams 2003, for further information.

In the U.S. political system, there are different facets of policy-making. In the administration, the following actors have varying degrees of ability to set the 'agenda' and 'alternatives': the president has the ability to dominate the policy agenda but not the alternatives to be deliberated; staff in the White House and the Executive Branch are important in forming alternatives rather than the agenda; political appointees in departments and bureaus, who prioritise certain issues (Kingdon, 1994/2003: 23-24, 26-27).

Another pertinent group is Congress, having the ability to control both the agenda and alternatives through hearings, speeches and the introduction of bills via 'bicameralism': the use of the House and the Senate to make laws, both of which specialise in particular areas (Baker, 1989/1995: 16). The most fundamental difference between the two houses of legislation-making is the fact that Senators represent entire states and serve for six years, whilst House representatives are from districts within states and only have a two year term (Baker, 1989/1995: 13-14). Given there are five hundred and thirty-five representatives, this may produce a variety of agendas and members may not have expertise in particular areas (Kingdon, 1994/2004: 34-35). This is especially true in the House, which consists of four hundred and thirty-five members: this is more representative of the diversity of the nation, but is less able to deal with conflicts (Baker, 1989/1995: 101-102). By contrast, voters from small states are overrepresented in the Senate (Groseclose and Milyo, 2005: 1216).

Interest groups play a pertinent role in US policy-making (see, for example, Kingdon 1994; Rozell *et al.* 2006 for more general information on interest groups; and Spitzer 2004, 2012 for gun-related ones). When the focus of interest groups is narrow and singular — like gun policy — they tend to adopt and stick firmly to polarised positions (Spitzer, 2004: 15). In some sense, a social group like this is the social counterpart of ideologies, where actions, resources and membership are predicated on its ideological facets (van Dijk, 1998a: 186). It has been said the ideologies are the tool used to propagate their interests: "…many ideologies [are] developed precisely in order to sustain, legitimate, or manage group conflicts, as well as relationships of power and dominance" (van Dijk, 1998a: 24). The influencing power of interest groups is said to lie in their ability to "mobilise and sway popular sentiment in the aftermath of a pivotal event" (Spitzer, 2004: 74): an event like a school shooting would fit that description.

It is important interest groups build relationships with Senators and House representatives and help them with elections. Interest groups can work with political actors to draft bills or attempt to gain their support, although they cannot control how Senators and House representatives will actually vote on a bill (Baker, 1989/1995: 16, 61; Rozell *et al.*, 2006: 14-15). In a sense, it could be said they act as a conduit between the public and legislators: "They perform a useful, even indispensable, function of supplying legislators with information about policies and legislation under consideration" (Egger and Harris, 1963: 89). Moreover, it has been said that communications between interest groups and voters is pivotal to the democratic process, with endorsement 'hit lists' and voters' guides attempting to persuade the public. Interest groups attempt to influence public policy outcomes by helping to elect like-minded candidates who are in state and local electoral campaigns (Rozell *et al.*, 2006: 3, 162).

Interest groups also have the potential to shape the 'policy' and 'problem' streams, by framing issues in certain ways that are translatable into policy outcomes (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005: 7; Gabrielson, 2005: 84). The strategies of interest groups will be dependent on their over-arching goal and resources (newsletters, volunteers, conventions and so forth) (Rozell *et al.*, 2006: 2). With expertise in their area of interest and resources behind them, interest groups have the potential to encourage or stall proposals, as well as to provide the 'decision agenda' of *alternative* options to those currently being considered by the government (Kingdon, 1994/2003: 4, 49). In reality, interest groups are more likely to block rather than promote action with their framing (Gabrielson, 2005: 84; Kingdon, 1994/2003: 49) — a salient example of this is the pro-gun rights groups such as the *NRA*. Their role should not be overestimated, however, for whilst they can raise an issue, attempt to sustain discussions about it, and mobilise their members, their ability to actually 'control' the debate is limited (Kingdon, 1994/2003: 50, 52).

8.2. Key Gun Legislations

Until the early twentieth century, any type of gun regulations revolved around restricting *where* guns could be carried — such as the banning of guns in public spaces like Saloons — rather than *who* could own them (Dizard *et al.*, 1999: 5-6; emphasis added). A noticeable change in gun control was provoked by the implementation of the eighteenth

amendment, in place from 1920-1933, which prohibited the sale and production of alcohol. During the Prohibition era, organised crime became prolific with heavily-armed criminals controlling underground drinking. In 1929, Al Capone's hit men murdered seven rival mobsters with Thompson submachine guns. Images of the deceased men in the media prompted the start of a movement towards gun control spearheaded by President Franklin Roosevelt, with a particular emphasis on regulating Thompson submachine guns and sawed-off shotguns. Consequently, the 'National Firearms Act' (1934) was implemented and centred only on submachine guns, the preferred weapons of choice for gangsters (Dizard *et al.*, 1999: 10-11; Spitzer, 2012: 131). The emphasis on 'gangster threat' led to the law removing handguns from the original bill. Thereafter, the 'Federal Firearms Act' (1938) was passed, mandating gun dealers be licensed and for gun purchases to be tracked; however, this law was difficult to enforce because of its language denoting that the gun provider had to *knowingly* sell the prohibited weapons (Vizzard, 1999: 132; Spitzer, 2012: 131-132; emphasis added).

Following the implementation of these two federal-level laws, declining crime rates meant that no further action was taken until the 'Gun Control Act' of 1968: this was enacted in response to public outrage about the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Mather Luther King Jr.. This law circumscribed banning guns for certain categories of people and tightened seller regulations, such as restricting mail-order sales (Cornell, 2006: 205; Vizzard, 1999: 131-132). The translation of this law into regulatory action was not as successful as it could have been, with Vizzard (1999: 133) describing it as a "statement of intended policy than a framework for policy implementation." Consequently, those in favour of gun control perceived this act as just a 'smokescreen' with limited usefulness; however, for activists campaigning for gun rights this law was seen as the first major challenge to constitutional rights. As a result, the 'Gun Control Act' (1968) paved the way for the formation of advocacy groups affected and motivated by gun policies (Vizzard, 1999: 133) — more will be said on the role of interest groups in the next subsection.

In 1988, the attempted assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan and the serious wounding of his press secretary, James Brady, led to the passage of the 'Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act' (1994) — more commonly referred to in public discourse as the 'Brady Bill.' This prescribed a five day waiting period for federal firearm licenses before conducting purchases and the provision of federal funding for states to improve the background check system (Cuthbertson, 2011: 11; Spitzer, 2004: 130). Criticisms of the law are mainly directed at its 'loophole,' meaning background checks are

not required for private transactions: the means by which the majority of banned persons obtain their guns (Vizzard, 1999: 135).

The final major piece of federal legislation was Title XI of the 'Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act' (1994-2004) — most commonly known as the 'federal assault weapons ban' — which expired under George W Bush's administration back in 2004. The law surfaced after the 1989 Stockton, California shooting of children at an elementary school and was developed further when Clinton took office (Squires, 2000: 78). The ban was very specific in the types of semi-automatics that were prohibited: threaded barrels, pistol grips, and ammunition magazines. It was possible, however, for the 'banned weapons' to be transformed into a 'legal' copy by removing certain cosmetic features; also, weapons manufactured before the law was implemented were 'grandfathered' making them legal to own and transfer. For that reason, it has been said that the ban was more about *firearm accessories* than weapons themselves (Koper, 2013: 159-160). Components of this ban were a focus of discussion for most interviewees and are documented in chapter ten.

Of particular interest from this historical overview is the fact that two major federal gun control laws — the 'Gun Control Act' (1968) and the 'Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act' (1994) — were proposed in the aftermath of highly-publicised assassinations/attempted assassination; this raises the issue of whether action was taken because the attacks were directed at Presidents and political leaders rather than ordinary citizens. Possibly, if no action had been taken on either of these occasions, public outrage might have ensued. The federal legislation also fuelled conspiracy theories that the governments staged the assassinations of J. F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.: Neal Knox wrote in *Shooting News* that these were all part of a 'master plot' to persuade citizens to support gun control (Davidson, 1998: 300-301) — sentiments like this will be discussed further in chapter eleven when looking at public support for gun reform.

8.3. Interpretations of the Second Amendment

The debate about 'gun control' and 'gun rights' is still on-going. The significance of language to politics has been documented by Edelman (1964), who notes that the

allocation of values — in this case, the perception that certain groups have disdain/hatred for guns — has the ability to secure political success.

This debate of 'pro-gun' and 'anti-gun' — two categories which are too restrictive and reductive to actually be reflective of how people view this issue — are driven by two different ideological bodies of thought surrounding the second amendment (for further information see Cornell 2006; Malcolm 1994; Williams 2003): 'individual rights' and 'states rights.' van Dijk (1998a: 98) has questioned whether those who hold ideologies are 'aware' of them. The prevalence of ideologies in group discourse become explicated when each side defend their points of view and criticises any opposing stances. The influencing nature of group interests exists in the way they portray social problems to legitimate or oppose power relations (van Dijk, 1998a: 5, 98) — this is something which is of key important to the gun violence debate. To take this idea further, Stone (1989: 283) pointed to ideas from each opposing side being utilised to frame policy options. Complicating attempts to view the constitution as a framework for law — a doctrine known as 'originalism' — are the difficulties in applying original meanings to contemporary situations that the founders may never have foreseen (Lund, 2009: 1346).

It has been purported by those supporting the 'individual rights' paradigm that the 'militia' part of the Second Amendment, at the time of writing, was intended for all White adult males and this has now been upgraded to all adult citizens (Davidson, 1998: 135). The 'individual rights' interpretation focuses on the operative clause of the Second Amendment: 'the right to bear arms shall not be infringed' (Lund, 2009: 1348). Cornell (2006: 214) was critical of the two dimensions of 'individual rights' thinking, claiming they promote an 'anti-civic' notion of guns as a way to repel other citizens and the government.

The other side of the debate, gun control advocates promote the 'states right' — sometimes known as 'collective rights' — interpretation of the Second Amendment, commonly seen to embrace the preamble part of it referring to a 'well-regulated militia' (Lund, 2009: 1347). In this view, the Second Amendment is there to protect the power of states — as opposed to individual citizens — to maintain militias (see Williams 2003). This militia is, therefore, believed to take the form of state military forces offering protection from a corrupt federal government, with the point being made that gun owners

have not had militia training (Davidson, 1998: 135; Williams, 2003: 71). Squires (2000: 75) argued that there is nothing in the second amendment prohibiting individual states from enforcing gun control legislation. Cornell (2006: 214-215) was critical of 'states right' supporters, accusing them of failing to position gun control within a constitutional framework that would appeal to American values of liberty.

8.4. The Heller (2008) and McDonald (2010) Supreme Court Rulings

The 2008 Supreme Court ruling *District of Columbia et al. v. Dick Anthony Heller*, 554 U.S. 570, lifted the Washington, D.C. handgun restrictions and set some guidelines on what *was* constitutional in terms of gun regulation. Moreover, the 2010 *Otis McDonald, et al. v. City of Chicago, Illinois, et al.*, 561 U.S. 3025, case incorporated the *Heller* ruling into state rights.[83] Both cases effectively guaranteed the individual right to keep and bear arms (Rogers, 2012: 673) and removed the possibility of a blanket gun ban similar to that of the UK's.

Firstly, the history of the *Heller v. District of Columbia* ruling will be outlined to give the issue some context. Following a rise in crime in the 1970s, the District of Columbia enacted the 'Firearm Control Regulations Act' (1976): handguns purchased after this date could not be registered and it was illegal to own a handgun without registering it, thus creating a ban of sorts (the only exceptions applied to people working in law enforcement and security); concealed carrying was banned; guns in the home had to be kept unloaded and secured with a trigger lock (Doherty, 2008: 26, 45; Spitzer, 2012: 36). Residents of the District of Columbia were permitted to own shotguns and rifles; however, these had to be disassembled or secured with a trigger lock and were only permitted to be used for hunting or recreational shooting *not* self-defence (Winkler, 2009: 1554). It was the most restrictive gun control law in the country (Lund, 2009: 1344; Winkler, 2009: 1553). Criticisms of the law centred on its restrictions on self-defence abilities. Sangero (2010: 453) made the point that criminals are frequently equipped with firearms and hence that prohibiting handguns renders citizens' right to defend themselves non-existent.

A case was brought to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals by Dick Heller, a special police officer who wanted to keep a post-1976 handgun in his home for self-defence (Rogers, 2012: 666): this presented an opportunity for the meaning of the second

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[83] These will be referred to simply as just *Heller* and *McDonald* now from on.

amendment to be defined. The *United States Supreme Court*(*USSC*) (2008: syllabus, 3) came to the conclusion with a narrow 5-4 vote that: "the handgun ban and trigger lock requirement violate the second amendment." The five acceding judges invoked the 'individual rights' paradigm by arguing that the second amendment *protected* "an individual right to possess a firearm…for traditionally lawful purposes, such as self-defense within the home" (*USSC*, 2008: syllabus, 1; emphasis added). The four judges who dissented drew upon the 'states right paradigm' by arguing that the second amendment was a right for militias rather than individuals and the D.C. law was effective as a method of crime control (Spitzer, 2012: 36).

Supporters of the ruling claimed that it reaffirmed the 'natural right' of self-defence, as one recognised and protected by the constitution (Kopel 2008; Sangero 2010). Spitzer (2012: 42), by contrast, was critical of the *Heller* ruling, maintaining that constitutional guidelines were originally designed around armies and militias.

Further complicating matters is that fact that the ruling also made the point that the second amendment is not unlimited: "It is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose" (*USSC*, 2008: syllabus, 2). Winkler (2009: 1562, 1574) praised the *Heller* ruling for drawing up of a 'laundry list' of restrictions. Without this, it may have been the case that lower courts would have faced numerous challenges to gun regulations already in place. The ruling reinforced that there should be certain prohibitions on *where* firearms can be carried, making them off-limits in 'sensitive places' like schools and government buildings and *who* is allowed to own them: dangerous groups like criminals and those suffering from mental illness should still be banned (*USSC*, 2008: syllabus, 2; emphasis added). As will be discussed in chapter nine, the concealed carry on campus movement is disputing that 'schools' extends to colleges and universities.

It was also ruled that ammunition magazines should be limited to offer a 'critical benefit' to law enforcement, potential victims and other bystanders in a mass shooting situation (Rosenthal and Winkler, 2013: 233). There is also the possibility for *certain* weapons to be regulated and for laws relating to storage requirements to be enacted (Spitzer, 2012: 36). Sangero (2010: 467) concurred with that sentiment, asserting that firearms superfluous to self-defence, such as machine guns, are viable objects for regulation. As chapter ten will show, however, the firearms needed for self-defence have been the subject of debate after a magazine limit was recently implemented in Colorado.

The next major Court decision came in the case *McDonald v. City of Chicago* (2010), which did not overrule the Chicago law (consisting of similar restrictions to that of D.C.),

but ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment allows for the Second Amendment ruling in *Heller* to be incorporated into state laws. This decision was, similar to *Heller*, made by a tight margin of five in the majority for the viewpoint that the right of individual citizens to bear arms; whilst the four dissenting judges maintained that *Heller* was the wrong decision (Spitzer, 2012: 38). The consequences of this are that state and local level gun regulations can be challenged on Second Amendment grounds; until this ruling, the Second Amendment was only applicable to federal-level government actions. This further reinforced the individual self-defence stance taken in *Heller*, but *McDonald* also failed to define precisely what the restrictions of the Second Amendment actually were (Rogers, 2012: 668, 673; Wasserman, 2011: 9, 12).

8.5. Concealed Carry on Campus: Background Context to Movement

The Virginia Tech incident gave traction to the 'concealed carry on campus' movement. In the state of Virginia, staff and students are forbidden from carrying firearms on college and campuses, although visitors with concealed carry permits are permitted to do so (Kopel, 2009: 527). Concealed carry laws at colleges and universities generally fall into three categories: completely banning firearms on campus, including for 'concealed carry permit' holders; allowing individual institutions to determine whether to allow concealed carry on campus through mandatory or discretionary policies; allowing permit holders to carry their weapons on campus. Overall, thirty and nineteen states follow into the second and third categories respectively (Wasserman, 2011: 4, 6).

It has been claimed that social movements led to the formation of interest groups, which thereafter determine the resources needed to reach those goals (Rozell *et al.*, 2006: 10). The climate following Virginia Tech was ripe for the formation of a group of student activists, *Students for Concealed Carry* (*SCC*). The function of the group, according to the *SCC* website, is two-fold in nature: dispelling misconceptions about concealed carry on campus and advocating state-level change with legislators and school administrators. It does not adopt a stance on concealed carry in elementary, middle and high schools, nor is it affiliated to any political party or other gun rights interest group (*SCC* n.d.). The group has already had some notable victories, in particular the case *Students for Concealed Carry on Campus V. Regents of the University of Colorado* (2012). *SCC* maintained that the concealed carry ban violated state-level legislation, the 'Colorado Concealed Carry Act,'

and the state constitution's right to self-defence. The Colorado Supreme Court granted *certiorari* to *SCC*'s claims and this led to universities in Colorado allowing concealed carry on campuses (Rogers, 2012: 685).

Following Virginia Tech, there were a number of proposals in state legislatures throughout the nation to allow students to carry concealed weapons. In 2008, Utah's Supreme Court concluded that, in order to comply with state law, higher and further education institutions did not have the authority to ban on guns on campus and so it became the only state where institutions were forced to allow concealed carry on campus. The Utah case then became a model for other proposals in seventeen states in 2008, all of which failed. Reacting to this movement, California enacted legislation in 2008, which actually *strengthened* the concealed carry on campus ban in public and private colleges and universities. In 2011, the mass shooting in Tuscon, Arizona was said to have brought the issue back to the forefront of the debate (Wasserman, 2011: 2, 8). At the present time, the states of Colorado, Mississippi, Oregon, Utah and Wisconsin now allow concealed carry on campus (*NCSL* March 2013).

Further complicating matters are the *Heller* and *McDonald* cases. The *Heller* ruling maintained that the Second Amendment protected the rights of individuals to have firearms to protect one's 'hearth and home'; whilst the *McDonald* case incorporated this right into the laws of states and localities, so any policies have to take this into account (Miller, 2011: 248; Smith 2013; 1053). Furthermore, the *Heller* ruling did not specify whether the right to carry firearms for self-defence purposes applied only to the home (Pratt 2013: 618, 620). Rogers (2012: 696), similarly, argued that absolute firearm bans on campuses infringe upon constitutional rights. The *Heller* and *McDonald* rulings also favoured retaining concealed carry bans in 'sensitive places' like government buildings and schools (Pratt, 2013: 604-605). Of particular interest in the 'campus debate' is that educational institutions fall under the rubric of 'sensitive places' as defined by *Heller*; however, at the same time, it is unclear whether this *only* applies to K-12 schooling where minors are present (see, for instance, Miller 2011; Pratt 2013; Rogers 2012; Smith 2013; Wasserman 2011). The fact that colleges and universities hold K-12 field trips and education camps and so forth may strengthen the 'sensitive places' argument (Wasserman, 2011: 36).In future, the link between student residency halls being their residence for the duration of term time is likely to be the greatest challenge to concealed carry on campus bans (see Miller 2011; Pratt 2013; Smith 2013). A counterchallenge to this would be since students have to be over twenty-one to own firearms, most of them are too young to own firearms anyway (Smith, 2013: 1065).

9. Concealed Carry on Campus Movement

Introduction

Scholars, particularly those with expertise in United States law, have begun to track the concealed carry on campus movement (for a more general overview see Kopel 2009; Rogers 2012; for post-*Heller* implications consult Miller 2011; Pratt 2013; Smith 2013; Wasserman 2011). This chapter aims to document the current concerns relating to this movement that prohibiting firearms is necessary for the freedom of expression and safety more generally, as well as perceptions contributing to support for it: doubt about the abilities of law enforcement to offer protection for individual citizens; a feeling of vulnerability and defencelessness in 'gun free zones' such as college and university campuses; the need to take responsibility for one's own life. It is important to note that the debate revolves around public higher education institutions which are considered state actors and thus fall under the jurisprudence of state law; private colleges and universities are not subject to the same requirements (Rogers, 2012: 665).

Findings come from a variety of sources: comments from Columbine, Virginia Tech and concealed carry on campus *YouTube* videos; interviews with gun violence prevention interest groups, a political pollster and an emergency management director with law enforcement expertise; policy developments traced through the *National Conference of State Legislators* website.

The first section of this chapter will look at two opposing sides to the debate, documented by *YouTube* comments and thoughts of my interviewees: sentiments entrenched within the 'individual rights paradigm' equating concealed carry with the individual right to self-defence; the arguments against the movement, with concerns about safety because of the young age of students and the presence of alcohol and drugs in such an environment.

The following chapter section will look at the erosion of trust and legitimacy in law enforcement (see Tyler 2011). The blaming of law enforcement, discussed in chapter six, seems to have marked the start of a feeling of mistrust towards the abilities of law enforcement. *YouTube* users seem to have little faith in the abilities of law enforcement to

protect them and also believe that the police have no legal obligation to protect citizens. Concealed carry is presented as the 'remedy' (Entman 1993).

This leads onto the final section on self-defence. It starts by discussing *YouTube* discourses blaming the Virginia Tech shootings on the university' concealed carry ban. Discussed thereafter is this notion that 'gun free zones' are 'soft' and 'easy' targets for criminals, with *YouTube* commentators referencing past school shootings and equating 'gun free zones' with potential victimhood (see Altheide 2002b; Furedi 2007). It will be shown that individuals are defying concealed carry bans by bringing hidden firearms to campuses to negate this state of fear (see Gray *et al.* 2011; Jackson and Gray 2010; Lee 2007). Lastly, the practicalities of the 'self-defence' argument will be debated about students shooting back and law enforcement responders possibly being confused about who the shooter is. The dichotomy of 'criminal' and 'law-abiding citizens' is shown to be contributing to the idea that a concealed carry permit holder will be able to neutralise a school shooter.

9.1. Conflicting Sides: Sentiment about Concealed Carry on Campus

9.1.1 "Why does my right to defend myself end when I go to class?" The Individual Rights Paradigm

In the 'concealed carry on campus' *YouTube* sample, there were about sixty comments expressing support for the movement — the motivations behind this will be explored in the next two sections of this chapter. For the moment, an overview of the support for this issue will be outlined. A number of *YouTube* users framed campus gun bans as violating their rights as per the 'individual rights paradigm' (Cornell 2006; Malcolm 1994; Williams 2003). Here is a selection of some of the comments made:

> "When I enter my campus, I suddenly do not have all of my
> constitutional rights."
> "Why does my right to defend myself end when I go to
> class?"

> "People are being forced to sacrifice their second amendment
>
> rights to receive an education."

Another *YouTube* commentator compared carrying firearms to having fire extinguishers in classrooms: a safety precaution in case an emergency was to transpire. These are examples of 'dogmatic thinking' (Lane 1966) seeking to reinforce current ideological stances that the purpose of the second amendment is to provide protection against threats. To support their argument, a handful of users referred to the *Heller* and *McDonald* rulings: "The Supreme Court has already ruled that keeping firearms for individual self-defence is constitutional." Missing from *YouTube* discussions, however, is the fact that these rulings mandated that bans in 'sensitive places' still apply.

Notably, it seems the issue particularly bothering these users is not being able to carry on campus is making them feel 'vulnerable' (see Sacco and Glockman 1987). This feeling is exacerbated when the threat is predicated on the actions of others (as in the case of a school shooter) and one's personal resources to control the outcome are low (in this case, the lack of a firearm for self-defence) (Sacco and Glockman, 1987: 101, 103). Interviewee, John McDonald, Emergency Management Director for *Jefferson County,* believed that this feeling of 'vulnerability' originated in the Columbine shooting:

> "Columbine was our worst nightmare: live on TV, we
>
> watched as innocent children lay dead, bleeding or running
>
> terrified from unimaginable horror…for the first time, this
>
> vulnerability existed in the consciousness of our country and
>
> we, as a society, didn't like it."

9.1.2 *"We can't take civilian life and turn it into war": The Question of Safety*

My gun-related interviewees were very much against allowing concealed carry on campus. The comment in the sub-section title was said by Andrew Goddard, VACPS, who felt uncomfortable with the notion of allowing firearms in educational institutions. Similarly, Jim Kessler, *TW,* said the idea of it failed the 'common sense test': "Here's a kid on the

campus — nineteen years old maybe — and possibly drinking: could there be a worse combination, you know*?*" *CC*'s Eileen McCarron pointed to a number of factors making this situation particularly volatile:

> "Some classes get in quite a lot of sometimes heated
> debates…it's a time when young people are maturing, their
> hormones are pumping up pretty high; [there are] lots of
> rivalries for friendships, relationships; lots of drinking — it's
> a bad scenario."

Concerns documented in *YouTube* discussions revolved around similar ideas. Some users pointed to the young age of students at higher education institutions hindering their ability to make rational decisions:

> "They are still just kids. There is a greater chance of poor
> decision-making in a college environment."
> "The brain develops into the mid-twenties, an age which
> most students haven't reached."
> "There will be emotionally immature and stressed-out kids
> running around with guns."

Users were also concerned that the presence of firearms might exacerbate conflicts: "Fist fights could turn into shootouts"; "I've seen students attacking each other. What if they had guns?" Others pointed to the presence of alcohol and drugs, being of particular concern in dorms where parties take place. The idea of students as drunken, emotionally immature and irresponsible relies on stereotypical schemata: mentally stored ideas forming perceptions (Entman 1993). In contrast, there were users who challenged the claims made above. One stated: "Not all students are crazy partying machines"; whilst another pointed out it is hypocritical not to trust students: "So, they're too dumb to have firearms, yet they are receiving a higher education."

Some *YouTube* users supported concealed carry on campus in theory, but maintained

that *certain* students could not be trusted to carry firearms:

> "My friends and I are responsible, but there are plenty of students I would not trust [to conceal carry] or feel safe around."
>
> "The gun owner may be a responsible and safe person, but most others in that environment are not."

Other users argued that firearms on campus removed the security and freedom of all students: "I would be scared if people were carrying guns at my campus." This brings to mind the point Gabriel and Greve (2003: 605) made about car park signs reserving spaces near the door for female drivers: this is meant to reassure them but could also serve to remind them there is a 'threat' in that environment. A similar scenario could be applicable to concealed carry on campus where the presence of weapons or the knowledge that there was the possibility students have the potential to be legally armed could trigger more fear.

In a compromise of sorts, some users then were supportive of the idea but with general conditions: 1) not allowing students to carry whilst drinking alcohol; 2) requiring more training for permit holders to carry on campus, perhaps from law enforcement officials; 3) obtaining a full background check, perhaps even asking their professors for references; 4) carrying guns in a holster as ones in backpacks could be easily triggered or stolen. One user even suggested that it could be an impetus for students achieving a higher standard of grades: "The rule could be they have to get good grades to carry. This could encourage some students to try harder." For concealed carry on campus to ever gain widespread support then, it seems that certain conditions will have to be met. A solution to meet any post *Heller* and *McDonald* challenges would be to allow firearms in campus housing but no other buildings, or to tailor restrictions to students suffering from mental illnesses although this would pose some ethical and practical issues (Smith, 2013: 1064, 1067).

9.2. A Lack of Trust and Legitimacy in Law Enforcement

The quality of police decision-making is claimed to affect perceptions of 'legitimacy' (if people follow their orders) and 'trust' to fulfil the duties of maintaining order, fighting crime, and being responsible and accountable (Farrall *et al.*, 2009: 203;Tyler, 2011: 256, 263). As discussed in chapter six, the critical reaction to law enforcement response during the Columbine shooting in particular has eroded that trust and legitimacy to some extent. This could be feeding into thematic areas which are driving the dependence on individual self-defence: 'law enforcement does not adequately protect citizens and are just there to clear up the crime scene' (i.e. they will *not* be there to protect individuals) and 'law enforcement has no obligation to protect individual citizens' (i.e. there is no legal grounding for them to do so). I will go through both of these thematic areas in this section to set the foundations for the growing reliance on self-defence that is feeding into the concealed carry on campus movement. *YouTube* comments in videos relating to concealed carry on campus, arming teachers and the Virginia Tech video sample[84] were all analysed to gauge the motivations behind support for this movement.

9.2.1 "When seconds matter, police are just minutes away."

Still quite prevalently circulating in *YouTube* discussions, with the amount of comments totalling a few hundred, is the sentiment that 'law enforcement does not adequately protect citizens and are just there to clean up the crime scene.' Breaking this into two parts, the first part about inadequate protection is said by interviewee, John McDonald (*Jefferson County*), to be related to the number of mass shootings since Columbine: "The public doesn't see the 'wins' associated with the lessons learned [since Columbine] but they continue just to see the innocents still lost." This hence prompts people to realise that "the police can't be everywhere at all times." Correspondingly, in *YouTube* comments an often-quoted sentiment was "When seconds count, police are just minutes away."

The relatively short time period in which school shootings occur is likely a driving factor. *YouTube* users made sardonic comments — a form of 'intonation' (Parlmer 1976/1981) — that pizza would be delivered before the police arrived. Commentators drew upon knowledge of past school shootings, pointing out that most of these ended *before* law enforcement arrived: "Cops never get the chance to confront an attacker. They always kill themselves before that point." There is some truth to this: only 27% of thirty-seven school

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[84] There were no particular comments relating to this in the Columbine video sample.

shootings were stopped by law enforcement (Vossekuil *et al.* 2002) and several studies (Lankford 2013a, 2013b) have documented the proclivity of school shooters to kill themselves before law enforcement intervention.

YouTube users were particularly scathing — a form of 'intonation'; see Parlmer 1976/1981 — of the abilities of law enforcement on college and university campuses to offer protection, purporting they were 'tiny forces' with 'little experience' and thus 'not equipped' to act as first responders to a school shooting situation. A similar point was actually made by risk management specialists Adams *et al.* (2011: 13) that campus police, unlike regular law enforcement, are unlikely to daily encounter situations that require quick judgment and actions. Something which acutely concerned users was the fact that in some states campus police are 'unarmed,' meaning they do not have access to lethal weapons (firearms)[85]. For instance, one user stated: "Even more stupidly, campus police aren't allowed to carry guns!" The Secret Service (2002) report, however, found that only 8% of school shootings required law enforcement to discharge weapons.

The outcome of these sentiments leads onto the second part of the theme that police are just there to 'clean up the crime scene' of all those killed before they arrived. One user described it in the following way: "The police *respond* to situations. You are *in* the situation." As documented in empirical studies by Farrall *et al.* (2009) and Gray *et al.* (2011), fear is a catalyst for eroding trust and confidence in the police. This is particularly the case when people suffer from constant and damaging 'dysfunctional worry': in this case, it would be students whose fear of a school shooter or even just general crime on campus occurs in regular episodes and affects their quality of life (see Gray *et al.*, 2011: 86). Accordingly, numerous *YouTube* commentators appeared to believe that the purpose of the police is *not* to act as 'bodyguards' or 'prevent crimes' but to 'enforce the law' by investigating crimes after they transpire and acting as a visible deterrent to criminals.

9.2.2 "The police have no duty to protect private citizens."

The other emerging, though not quite so prevalent, theme was that "the police are under no obligation to protect individual citizens." Users drew upon past legal cases to maintain that

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[85]Arming campus police was an issue debated after Virginia Tech (Adams *et al.,* 2011; Gray 2008). The *International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators* (Thrower *et al.*, 2008: 7) recommended that all sworn campus officers should be armed with lethal (defined as at least one firearm) and non-lethal weapons.

the responsibility instead falls to individuals themselves: "*You* are responsible for protecting yourself," one user argued. The particular example commonly employed by commentators is the Supreme Court case *Warren V. District of Columbia* (1981): three women filed a claim after the police left the scene (they knocked on the door and received no response), whilst the women were being raped and beaten by two intruders in their home; a second call made to an emergency dispatcher failed to even make it through to the police. The result of the case was that the police cannot be held liable for the crime which took place because they are not constitutionally required to provide protection to individual citizens (Higgins 2013). The point that the police cannot be sued for failing to prevent someone becoming a victim of crime has been reiterated — and used as an argument for allowing individuals to bear arms— in several texts (Doherty, 2008: 76; Synder, 1976/1999: 184).

This is another concrete part of the self-defence ideology. Interviewee, John McDonald, *Jefferson County*, pointed to cultural factors as a driving force:

> "Much of the American citizen's way of thinking is rooted in self-determinism and individualism. Combine that with a strong gun culture and what forms is the basis for the belief that it is 'our' responsibility and duty as individuals to protect."

Such an argument was presented in an article written by Synder (1976/1999: 184) advocating that individuals should take responsibility for defending themselves: "How can you rightfully ask another human being [a police officer] to risk his life to protect yours, when you will assume no responsibility yourself?" This disregards, however, the ethos of law enforcement officers predicated on 'wearing the badge': "There is a meaning and significance with the responsibility that is entrusted with the duty to protect and it is a solemn oath"-John McDonald, *Jefferson County*.

9.3 Self-Defence Argument

9.3.1 ""An armed student could have saved so many lives": Blaming Virginia Tech on the Concealed Carry Ban

The arguments presented in the public sphere following the Virginia Tech shooting (2008) are a useful starting point for looking at the origins of this issue. The tragic deaths at *Virginia Tech University* were commonly blamed on its ban prohibiting concealed carry on campus — this then paved the way for the movement to gain political traction. *YouTube* commentators in the Virginia Tech and 'concealed carry on campus' samples pointed to the duration of the shooting and the perpetrator walking between classrooms as creating opportunities for him to have been shot by a concealed permit holder. Adhering to the 'problem frame' requirement of an issue being fixed via a particular solution (Altheide, 1997: 655), users are directly equating the high death count with the concealed carry ban:

> "If only one person in that classroom had been armed, he
> might not have killed so many."
> "An armed student could have saved so many lives."
> "One law-abiding citizen could have taken down the shooter
> after the first couple of shots."

The terminology used here is indicative of an idealistic stance that a 'law-abiding citizen' carrying a gun would have been able to prevent themselves and others from becoming 'victims' — more will be said on these identities in the next few sub-sections. The 'processes' of what could have happened are conveyed through verbs like 'could have' and 'might not' (see Halliday 1994). Through speculative propositions (implicature; see Grice 1981) about being 'armed,' it may be inferred the 'circumstances' shaping this are the lack of firearms. To some degree, *YouTube* commentators blame 'regulatory failures' (Elias 1986), where the ban in place is held accountable for students not being able to take the 'appropriate precautions' of carrying firearms to campus.

In a similar vein, a *YouTube* video containing an interview with Virginia Tech survivor, Colin Goddard, who previously worked for *Brady* and now for *MAIG*, led to outrage and anger from many users. Some comments displayed incredulity (intonation; see Parlmer 1976/1999) that Colin was against concealed carry on campus:

> "Six of Colin's peers were concealed carry permit holders.
> None were carrying because they obeyed the rules…and now
> they're dead."
>
> "Colin's anger is misdirected: he should be mad at the rules
> which prevented him and his classmates from defending
> themselves. Instead, they had to hide under their desks?!"

Second-hand understandings of what took place at Virginia Tech are allowing for certain perceptions to crystallise in a number of users. Notably, Hale (1996) and Farrall *et al.* (2009) concluded that 'indirect victimisation' through learning about previous experiences with crime could potentially contribute to further anxieties about becoming a victim; perhaps more so than *direct* experiences for they, to some extent, 'demystify' what it is like to be a crime victim.

To take this argument further, for a number of users, the shooting at Virginia Tech represents what can transpire when students are not allowed to carry weapons: "People thought Virginia Tech was safe, didn't they?"; "Virginia Tech…enough said"; "Look at what happened at Virginia Tech." Ferraro (1995: 179) claimed fear of crime involves an "emotional response of dread or anxiety to crime or symbols a person associates with crime": as discussed in chapter five, the shooting at Virginia Tech evokes images of horror and is a 'buzzword' for the 'worst' gun massacre ever.' Further, if it epitomises to some what can happen if people are *not* carrying weapons, it is understandable that this would then translate into concealed carry on campus as the 'solution' to the problem (Altheide 1997).

9.3.2 *"Gun-Free Zones are an Invitation for Criminals": Feelings of Insecurity and Victimisation*

At the crux of the 'concealed carry on campus' debate is eradicating the 'gun free zone': a place where guns cannot currently be carried by citizens. This is something which is a divisive issue: some argue that prohibiting guns in those locations ensures public safety;

whilst others maintain that such places attract criminals because of the lack of armed resistance (Pratt, 2013: 604). It appears that the notion of a 'gun-free zone' has been socially constructed to infer a site where people are particularly vulnerable to attack. For instance, *Students for Concealed Carry* (n.d.) presented the following argument: "'Gun free zones' serve to disarm only those law-abiding citizens who might otherwise be able to protect themselves."

In the *YouTube* video datasets relating to 'concealed carry' and the Virginia Tech sample, similar arguments were made. In total, there were thirty comments encompassing the notion that criminals *purposely* target gun free zones: "Shooters attack schools because they are an easy target"; "'Gun free zones' are an invitation for criminals." Some *YouTube* users drew upon knowledge of previous school shooting events and argued that the lack of armed resistance encouraged the shooters to perpetrate their attack there. My gun-related interviewees, however, were particularly sceptical of school shooters purposefully targeting 'gun free zones':

> "When you look at gun crimes like what happened in
> Columbine, those are mostly very dangerous but crazy
> people; they're not thinking rationally like 'Oh, if I go here
> no one's gonna be able to shoot me.' Most of the people who
> do this, they're expecting to die that day."-Jim Kessler, *TW*.
> "That argument completely ignores the fact that almost all of
> the school shooters we've seen are suicidal [and] are
> planning to die by gunfire; some of them purposefully draw
> the gunfire of law enforcement."-Ladd Everitt, *CSGV*.

Furthermore, *YouTube* commentators made sarcastic comments — 'intonation' to convey meaning (see Parlmer 1976/1999) — indicating that they felt banning concealed carry on campus was a ludicrous way to try and prevent crime occurring there:

> "A number of students were held at gunpoint last month. It's
> almost like criminals have no regard for school policy."
> "Attention all criminals. This is a Defense-free zone. All

Law-Abiding Citizens have been disarmed for your
convenience. Enjoy."
"Okay, so all we need to do is put up a sign that says
criminals can't shoot people here and we will be safe.
Violent crime will be stopped by signs."

These sentiments, coupled by 'gun free zones' being commonly described as 'soft' and 'easy targets,' paved the way for the next prominent thematic area 'defenceless of gun-free zones,' with users making statements like: "The fact that we aren't allowed to carry here forces us to be a victim"; "Gun free zones equals killing zones." These *YouTube* commentators are equating potential victimhood— as previously conceptualised by, for instance, Altheide 2002a; Furedi 2007— with being in a 'gun-free zone.' The implications of this fear are covered in comments from users surmising they would be helpless in a school shooting scenario

"How is hiding behind my desk listening to my classmates
scream and hoping that the police, who are minutes away,
will arrive in time to save me the best way to defend
myself?"
"People are worried about students shooting each other?
That's what will happen when we are left defenceless [sic]
anyway."
"So, I get to stay indoors and hope they [an assailant] don't
come to the classroom and if they do, oh well, sucks [it is
unfortunate] for me?"

Such statements evoke Ferraro's (1995: 9) theory that the actor's own subjective interpretation of the physical environment and risk of victimisation affect their fear of that particular crime.

The main conclusion to draw from this frame is a general feeling of helplessness that there is no way to negate the threat. Key here is the *anticipation* of threats: "As sentient and symbolic beings humans have the ability to anticipate or contemplate events that lie in

the future (Warr, 2000: 454). As discussed in chapter five, the 'normalisation' of school shootings can result in the overestimation of risks; this 'probability neglect' can thereafter lead to 'affect rich' reactions where people take unnecessary precautions for the level of threat posed (Sunstein 2005). In the case of school shootings, key to the feelings of susceptibility to attack (Sacco and Glockman, 1987: 99) is the notion of not being able to *control* the crime should it transpire. Hale (1996: 5) argued that "people who feel unable to protect themselves [for a variety of reasons]…might be expected to 'fear' crime more than others."

Overall, this thematic area often ties in with the other themes of 'criminals targeting gun free zones' and 'law enforcement does not adequately protect citizens' where inter-linkage of these forms the perception that: 1) 'gun free zones' will face threats from criminals; 2) without concealed carry on campus, potential victims will be unable to defend themselves; 3) law enforcement will not protect them and will just 'clean up the crime scene.' Combining all these elements, it is not a far stretch to see how this leads into the 'solution' of concealed carry permit holders taking firearms to class to avert and negate any potential threats of criminal activity and extreme violence. The next few sub-sections will go on to explore those two ideas in more depth.

9.3.3. "I refuse to be a victim": Defying Concealed Carry Bans

As discussed in the previous sub-section, the 'fear of crime' — in this case, a distorted interpretation of the threat of a school shooting— has entrenched the 'culture of victimhood' (Altheide 2002b; Furedi 1997). One way to deal with victimhood is utilising resources for self-protection (Stanko, 2000: 13). This denotes a responsible actor who must do her or his upmost to insure against the possibility of victimisation (Lee, 2007: 104); thus, encompassing the individualism of self-defence in the U.S. (Squires 2013). Synder's (1976/1999: 185) comment is a prime example of this: "One who values his life…will possess and cultivate the means of fighting back." In contrast to this sentiment, Spitzer (2012: 63) said a 'safety-versus-self-defence paradox' exists, where actual incidences of people using guns to defend themselves against criminals are miniscule at 1.2%.

Looking at *YouTube* discussions, it certainly seems that this is driving another emergent trend: defying concealed carry bans by continuing to carry a concealed firearm on campus. Universities, with their sprawling, open nature and lack of metal detectors, are

only *trusting* students, staff and visitors not to bring guns. Interviewee, Jim Kessler, *TW*, made a similar point: "Just because somebody says it's a 'gun free zone' doesn't mean it's a 'gun free zone.' I mean, no one's checking to see if you've got a gun." With this in mind, it was perhaps unsurprising that a number of *YouTube* commentators admitted to carrying concealed firearms on campus, despite there being a ban in place:

> "With there being far too many school shootings recently, I carry my gun concealed anyway. No one is going to come in and gun down me and my peers."
>
> "I'd rather be judged at a court hearing than carried out [in a body bag] or go to a friend's funeral."
>
> "I refuse to be a victim. My life is more important than a rule."

What can be seen from this is that the threat of victimisation is interlinked with worry — which can be a damaging emotion if felt too frequently and intensely (Farrall *et al.*, 2009: 51) — around defencelessness in 'gun free zones.' Jackson (2009) found that high levels of worry correlated with people's chances of victimisation (whether their risk is 'relative': the social group they are part of is likely to be affected) and their perceived levels of control over the event and its consequences. In the case of school shootings, it could be inferred that students in higher education institutions would develop a state of fear based on: 'relative risk' (a high chance of their social group being affected); a lack of control over what transpires (without any form of defending themselves); severe consequences (likely to be serious injuries or death). Experiencing the emotion of 'fear' is said to produce adaptive strategies to deal with perceived dangers (Scherer *et al.*, 2004: 537). Carrying concealed guns on campus to pre-empt a school shooting is, therefore, an example of 'governance through fear' where individuals are taking precautions in an attempt to reduce victimisation (Lee, 2007: 141).

Moreover, *YouTube* users appeared relatively blasé about the possibility of being caught carrying a concealed weapon on campus, with them deducing that: 1) the 'concealed' nature of the weapon means no one will find out about it anyway; 2) if the firearm was revealed to shoot at an attacker, it will still be worth the risk because their lives are more important. This implies that some are so concerned about the potential risk

of victimisation that they are willing to break the rules and face the penalties. Since Jackson and Gray (2010) and Gray *et al.*'s (2011) studies found that persons concerned about victimisation could, to some extent, negate the initial state of fear by taking precautions, this might be what is occurring in the case of defying concealed carry on campus bans. Concealed carry could, therefore, be construed as an "intentional and overt reaction" (Gabriel and Greve, 2003: 603) to fear of this particular crime.

9.3.4 The 'Bruce Willis Argument': Will Concealed Carry Guarantee Protection?

The quotation part of this sub-section title was something coined by interviewee, Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*, to demonstrate he perceived the concealed carry and protection linkage to be idealistic in nature:

> "The idea of us having guns and all turning into Bruce Willis [by] firing off ten rounds with a six round gun and hitting the target every time and saving the day. It's a fantasy; it's a wonderful fantasy. Who wouldn't want to be a hero?"

Similarly, Jim Kessler, *TW*, said, the translation of concealed carry into stopping assailants is pragmatically not really viable:

> "Most of the time when somebody has a gun and starts shooting, your reaction is to leave. Like, 'I want to get out!' You have to be trained to walk towards somebody with a gun — police are trained to do that; the military is trained to do that — to walk towards the danger."

When it came to the practicalities of self-defence, divisions are evident in the *YouTube* discussions. Debates became quite heated with regards to whether students

with concealed carry permits could viably defend against an armed attacker. One source of conflict centred on the ability of students to adequately defend *without* inadvertently hitting an innocent bystander: "Even with training, you might panic in those few seconds with adrenaline running." Similarly, interviewee, Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*, raised the possibility that students might mistake concealed carry shooters for the school shooter:

> "Okay, somebody starts to fire and a number of people in there who don't know each other and are not wearing any form of uniform then decide to respond. If another person pops up and starts firing, how does the other person with a gun know that those two are not in it together?"

Other *YouTube* users rebuffed such concerns, stating that concealed carry permit holders were well-trained and thus would be able to shoot the school shooter without hitting any innocent bystanders. This adheres to the 'responsible actor' role: an individual who is proactively taking steps against potential victimisation (Lee 2007). Further, the idea that the school shooter and concealed carry 'protectors' would be so easily distinguishable relates to what Spitzer (2012: 176) calls the 'Good Guy-Bad Guy Myth' where an imagined separation exists between the two and one can easily tell them apart.

Perhaps an explanation for this idealistic separation lies in the dichotomy between 'criminals' and 'law-abiding citizens' terms also prolific throughout *YouTube* comments; hence adhering to Shore and Wright's (1990: 18) theory 'keywords' change in meaning as new discourse is formulated. In such discussions, the 'criminal' is an abstract figure and threatening outcast (Garland, 2001: 137), which *YouTube* users emotively refer to as 'psychopaths' or 'psychotic' and have the preconceptions that criminals, especially school shooters, will be able to circumvent the law to obtain guns and will kill indiscriminately. The 'Criminal Other' in this case is a 'Boogeyman' onto which anxieties can be projected (Farrall *et al*, 2009: 151). This is where the 'law-abiding citizen' fantasy figure comes in: the 'ideal' gun owner who is responsible, controlled, well-trained and willing to protect others. Relating these findings to Lippmann's (1922) notion of the 'stereotype,' showing these good guy-bad guy

perceptions are something people are told about and hence imagine before they actually experience it.

Another dispute in *YouTube* discussions was how law enforcement would know whether the persons firing guns were attacking or defending:

> "The role of SWAT is to find and kill the shooter. If they
> see you with a gun, they will likely shoot you."
> "If cops see you with a weapon, they will see you as a
> threat and you'll go down."
> "Do you think the police are going to ask 'Are you the
> guy who is killing everyone?'"

Such sentiments take the form of an 'anticipatory state' where people are surmising about potential dangers which could arise in a certain scenario (Farrall *et al.*, 2009: 155). Several of my interviewees drew similar conclusions that a situation involving concealed carry holders firing back would likely exacerbate matters:

> "The police run in and there's blood everywhere, people
> lying on the ground, and a number of people standing around
> with guns in their hands, they're gonna shoot them all! They
> can't wait to say 'Excuse me, sir, are you a good guy or a
> bad guy?'"-Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*.
> "You get into the O.K. Corral situation where you can't
> figure out who's the good guy and who's the bad guy when
> law enforcement arrives on the scene."-Representative from
> a leading GVP group.[86]

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[86] As outlined in the 'Research Sample' chapter, one of my gun violence prevention group interviewees wished for themselves and their group to be anonymised. For that reason, they will be referred to as 'Representative from GVP Group' whenever a statement from them is quoted or paraphrased; all other interviewees will be identified as per their requests.

The *YouTube* commentators' counter-responses to the concerns that law enforcement would not be able to distinguish between the 'good guys' and 'bad guys' relied on preconceptions held about the inadequacy of law enforcement. The 'Doubt about Law Enforcement' sub-section in this chapter showed that there is serious cynicism about the ability and obligation of law enforcement to protect individuals; this is reiterated once again in *YouTube* comments:

> "The likelihood that a police officer would show up in the first few *second* that an active shooter is being engaged in gunfire by another student is very low."
>
> "The police only come in after victims and the shooter are dead because their priority is self-preservation. The law-abiding citizen would then tell the cops that the threat had been neutralized."

This once again evokes the idea of 'defending one's position' by using highly-charged stereotypical preconceptions: "It is the projection upon the world of our own value, our own position and our own rights" (Lippman, 1922: 63). Such perceptions are no doubt exacerbated by the 'normalisation' of school and mass shootings more generally (refer back to chapter five for a reminder of this). Moreover, a lack of trust and confidence in law enforcement is likely to apply to individuals who suffer from 'dysfunctional worry' about school shooting threats (Farrall *et al.* 2009; Gray *et al.* 2011). It is not a far stretch to see how this would then translate into the idea that "one's victimage is one's own responsibility" (Lee, 2007: 104). Significantly, O'Malley (1996) spoke about the State 'governing at a distance', with individuals managing risk and taking responsibility for their own well-being: in this form, de facto privatisation of lethal force.

Conclusion

This chapter intended to provide a more detailed examination into the concealed carry movement which formed after the Virginia Tech shooting. Previous studies have tended to focus only on the legality of concealed carry bans, especially in a post *Heller*-context, so this chapter aimed to fill the current gap in knowledge with regards to sentiment about this movement and its entrenchment in fear, vulnerability and self-defence. Results come from analyses of *YouTube* comments taken from Virginia Tech and concealed carry on campus videos; feelings of interviewees from GVP interest groups and an emergency management director to whom I spoke.

In *YouTube* discourses, there was a clear divisiveness in the sentiments of users. A number of commentators used the self-defence component of the 'individual rights paradigm' to frame gun bans on campuses as unconstitutional. In making this argument, users referenced the *Heller* and *McDonald* rulings; although the argument in those cases that bans still should apply to 'sensitive places' like educational institutions was notably excluded from such discussions. In light of *Heller* and *McDonald*, it seems student housing falling under the rubric of 'self-defence in the home' may be the greatest challenge to campus bans in future.

The alternative argument was concerns about safety should bans on campuses be lifted. These sentiments came from my interest group interviewees and a number of *YouTube* users. The general feeling was that students were too young to make rational decisions and the presence of alcohol and drugs would exacerbate matters. This does rely on stereotypical schemata (Entman 1993) of how students behave; but these concerns suggest that if bans are ever lifted certain conditions would need to be met, such as further background checks and not carrying firearms whilst drinking alcohol.

The following section examined the perceptions that are contributing to the 'self-defence' argument: a lack of trust, confidence and legitimacy in law enforcement (see Farrall *et al.* 2009; Tyler 2011). It was argued that a partial contributing factor to this was the critical response to the delay in actions of law enforcement at the Columbine shooting discussed in chapter six. This goes some way to explaining the two themes relating to law enforcement that emerged in *YouTube* comments: police will *not* be there to protect individuals; there is no legal grounding for them to do so. The first theme was evident in the often-quoted sentiment: 'When seconds count, police are just minutes away.'

Interviewee, John McDonald, explained that the number of mass shootings since Columbine has cultivated this sentiment, showing people that the police cannot stop every tragedy. The feeling of *YouTube* users seemed to be that police are *not* there to 'prevent crimes' and save people's lives, but rather to 'clean up the crime scene' by *responding* to the aftermath of incidents. The beginnings of the 'self-defence' argument are evident here, with some *YouTube* users making the point that each individual should take responsibility for their own safety because the police are incapable of doing so.

YouTube users also appear to believe law enforcement is under no legal obligation to protect individual citizens and cite Supreme Court cases that have ruled this way. The element commentators seem to be disregarding, however, is the law enforcement ethos of 'wearing the badge,' explained by interviewee, John McDonald, as a "solemn oath to protect."

The final section focused on 'self-defence' and its relationship to concealed carry on campus. The Virginia Tech shooting was a turning point for this movement: as highlighted in chapter five, it has become a 'buzzword' for the 'worst school shooting' and seems to epitomise to some *YouTube* commentators what can transpire if people are *not* carrying weapons. Users blamed the campus ban for the high death toll of the Virginia Tech shooting and surmised that an armed student could have neutralised the shooter. This finding strengthens the assertions made by Hale (1996) and Farrall *et al.* (2009) that 'indirect victimisation' — in this case, the 'learned experience' of the Virginia Tech shooting — could potentially contribute to further anxieties about becoming a victim.

The translation of this was evidenced in *YouTube* comments relating to 'gun free zones' — places like college and university campuses where guns are prohibited — which a majority of users believed attracted criminals and left inhabitants defenceless. This is associated with 'potential victimhood' as conceptualised by Altheide (2002b), Furedi (2007) and Lee (2007). Concerns about not being able to *control* what would happen should a school shooting transpire adheres to arguments that people who feel they cannot protect themselves are more likely to fear crime (Hale 1996; Jackson 2009;Sacco and Glockman 1987). Such worry about potential victimisation could be a damaging emotion if felt too intensely (Farrall *et al.*, 2009).

Intense worry is probably responsible for the unexpected finding in *YouTube* discourse that some users are defying campus bans by carrying hidden firearms with them; the perceived risk of victimisation is heightening the need for a defensive strategy

(Gabriel and Greve 2003; Scherer *et al.* 2004) against potential victimisation from school shootings and more general campus crime. Interlinking all the perceptions discussed, it is understandable how some users would believe that concealed carry is the particular 'solution' to the problem (Altheide 1997) of school shootings: 1) 'gun free zones' are 'soft targets' and so will face threats from criminals, especially school shooters; 2) without concealed carry on campus, potential victims will be unable to defend themselves as evidenced in the case of the Virginia Tech shooting; 3) law enforcement will not protect them and will be there just to 'clean up the crime scene' shown by the delayed reaction at the Columbine shooting and other incidents since then.

The final sub-section critiques the assumption that concealed carry permit holders would be able to adequately defend against school shooters, with challenges coming from my GVP group interviewees and some *YouTube* users. The first problem raised is that in such a scenario students may hit innocent bystanders. *YouTube* users attempted to counteract such concerns by claiming that concealed carry 'protectors' would be able to separate the school shooter from other students. Further, users constructed the identities of 'law-abiding citizen' and 'criminal' to refer to each. This relates to the 'Good Guy-Bad Guy Myth' imagining that the two are easily distinguishable (Spitzer 2012) and falls under Lippmann's (1922) notion of the 'stereotype' as shaping perceptions of the world without actually ever experiencing phenomenon. The second major concern was that law enforcement would be confused as to which student is the attacker. *YouTube* users relied on preconceptions about the ability and obligation of law enforcement to protect individuals, producing a circular argument once again emphasising that individuals are responsible for defending against their own victimage (Lee 2007; O'Malley 1996). With users having such preformed answers to concerns raised, it seems that they are relatively fixed in their beliefs. With this in mind, it is likely that further school shootings will intensify these feelings and perhaps strengthen the belief that concealed carry on campus is the solution.

The purpose of this chapter was to get behind perceptions contributing to the concealed carry on campus movement. The next chapter will note and assess the viability of the prescriptive proposals to reduce or prevent school shootings suggested by my interest group and political pollster interviewees.

10. Gun Policies to Reduce School Shootings?

Introduction

This chapter will explore the avenues for gun policy thought by my gun-related interviewees to have the most salient impact on reducing school shootings. The overview here provides a very specific focus on suggestions of my gun related research participants on ways to reduce school shootings and more generally gun violence.[87] Since public sentiment and demand support are important in determining which items get attention (Anderson 2003; Burns and Crawford 1999; Kingdon, 1993/2004; Spitzer, 2004), the proposals suggested are assessed for their feasibility by gauging current levels of public support.

Gun violence prevention interest groups are engaging in a form of 'policy advocacy' (Anderson 2003) by constructing and thereafter promoting public policies to meet their goals. Scholars (for example, Davidson 1998; Spitzer 2004, 2012) have already begun to document the actions of gun-related interest groups and their role in policy-making. Such policy actors cannot control the 'decision agenda' of items up for discussion but do have the ability to sustain it and mobilise support for particular measures (Kingdon, 1994/2003: 50, 52). The 'framing' of issues and the importance assigned to each by 'priming' are important in defining the parameters of policy change (Callaghan and Schnell 2005; Entman 1993, 2007; Rochefort and Cobb 1994), so exploring gun-related interviewees' recommendations on specific areas of gun regulation to target could, therefore, be indicative of future policy developments.

Results presented here come mainly from interviews with gun violence prevention interest groups, a think tank director with expertise in gun legislation, and a political pollster; and a *Mayors Against Illegal Guns* 'No More Names' event that I attended whilst conducting fieldwork in Washington, D.C. Polls, surveys and *White House* petitions filed after Sandy Hook are also used as public opinion measures on specific gun regulations.

The layout of this chapter will discuss each of the following components: 'background

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[87] Since my thesis uses school shootings as a prism through which to view gun violence, I have excluded suggestions that might reduce gun deaths but not school shootings specifically, such as 'safe storage laws' to prevent accidental shootings by children.

checks' and 'assault weapons ban,' why my research participants suggested these particular measures and locating these suggestions within public opinion to ascertain whether they are potentially viable. First of all, I will discuss the gun show loophole and its relation to the Columbine shooting. Following that, the common goal of GVP groups to achieve 'universal background checks' for all sales, including those made online and at gun shows, will be outlined and placed within a post Sandy Hook context to assess its likelihood of gaining policy traction. In a similar vein, also provided is a summary of recent gun laws in Colorado, the site of the Columbine shooting. The final part of that section will look at the mental health criteria for prohibited gun owners, referring back to the Virginia Tech shooting.

The next section commences with a discussion of the federal 'assault weapons ban' (1994-2004): its purpose and impact on reducing crime; and criticisms of the law. After that, the section will look at restrictions on large capacity magazines and relating these back to school shootings. To finish off, there will be a summarisation of the recent restrictions on large capacity magazines in Colorado and the counterchallenges to the enactment of this law.

10.1. Background Checks

Discussion in this section will revolve around the advised actions from my interviewees and other sources to take on background checks in order to prevent school shootings. The first part looks at the 'universal background check' measure currently being advocated. Following that, the criteria for prohibiting gun purchases is discussed, particularly in relation to mental health.

10.1.1 Universal Background Checks

The 'Brady Bill' (1994) loophole allows background checks to be foregone in private transactions between individuals (such as classified advertisements) and at places like gun shows and flea markets (Winkler, 2009: 1556). Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*, claimed the appeal of private sales lies in the lack of transparency surrounding purchases:

"The classic example is the gun show where you can have
two tables side by side: one of them with a nice professional
sign on it and a table full of handguns; one of them next to it
with a handwritten piece of cardboard which says guns and
[has] a table full of handguns. Now, if you go to the table
with the pretty sign and the guy with the clipboard, you're
going to have to do a background check before you go buy
that gun. Go to the guy with that cardboard — he won't ask
your name."

Notably, a gun show is where the Columbine perpetrators obtained three of their
weapons. Robyn Anderson, a 'straw buyer' for the shooters who purchased the guns and
then transferred them, admitted that she would not have done so had there been paperwork
to fill out (Spitzer, 2012: 77). Kleck (2009: 1451) counteracted the need for background
checks at gun shows, noting that Columbine was the only incident in a series of seven
school shootings involving a gun show purchase; the other perpetrators stole guns to carry
out their attacks. Kleck (2009: 1452) further argued that one of the shooters, Eric Harris,
had been legally old enough to purchase the three long guns obtained. Presumably, then the
Columbine shooters went through the 'straw purchase' method with Robyn Anderson to
avoid alerting anyone to their plans. The fact that it facilitated preparations for this
particular school shooting makes one think closing the gun show loophole should at least
be considered as a policy option — as chapter one documented, this was closed in
Colorado by ballot initiative after the Columbine shooting.

Kleck (2009: 1454) came to the conclusion that 'cracking down' on gun shows would
not prevent another school shooting or even just more commonplace gun violence; the real
problem, he argued, is theft of guns. Wintemute (2013a: 104) made a similar
recommendation, saying that 'closing the gun show loophole' only goes a limited way to
solving the problem, as it is only addressing a small portion of private sales. Backing up
this point was Webster *et al.*'s (2013) findings from a survey of 1402 inmates at a state
correctional facility that the largest source of handguns for criminals was actually from
friends and family members (37.5%), whilst the smallest portion (1.7%) was from gun

shows and flea markets. Taking this argument further, *CC*'s Eileen McCarron believes that background checks need to go beyond gun shows:

> "We've closed the gun show loophole in Colorado, but they [prohibited persons] could go online, to newspaper ads, [and] to friends; there's nothing stopping them until we close that background check loophole."

My gun-related interviewees overall believed that universal background checks would reduce school shootings *and* the more commonplace gun violence deaths:

> "Focusing on mass shootings alone is a bit of a red herring because in the United States, every day on average, there are thirty-two people murdered with guns. So, it's extremely important to stay focused on the policies that have the chance of saving the most lives: the universal background check law holds the most promise in that regard."-Representative from GVP Group

The process of defining issues and linking them to the wider socio-political context is the 'framing' of public policy solutions (Rochefort and Cobb 1999). The comment above adhere to Entman's (1993: 52) claim that the framing diagnoses 'causes' of loopholes in current laws, and also suggests 'solutions' to rectify the problem: expanding background checks to improve public safety. It also parallels Pete Brodnitz's, *BSG*, recommendation that framing should revolve around solving a particular problem: "If you're just talking about regulating guns but you're not talking about solving a specific problem, then I don't think you'll get a lot of support." The main barrier to actually stimulating change, claimed *BSG*'s Pete Brodnitz is that a lot of legislation proposed after highly publicised shootings would not have prevented *that incident*: "People say 'Oh, yeah, it wouldn't have prevented the tragedy; in that case, I don't care.'" On the other hand, if there is a palpable link

between the shooting and the legislation proposed this is an easier argument to create 'policy demand' (see Anderson 2003) for:

> "Virginia Tech happens. The determination was there was some mental illness in the case of the shooter, so they say 'let's do something about mental illness [and guns]' — that's logical to me."- Pete Brodnitz, *BSG*.

Surprisingly, this does not seem to be the case with Sandy Hook, as 'background checks' would not have prevented this particular shooting. Despite this, Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*, described the post-Sandy Hook grassroots momentum pertaining to background checks as 'palpable':

> "It's not like one group wants to concentrate on assault weapons and one wants to concrete on something else; it's pretty much coming down to 'let's do the background checks.'"

Berger and Luckman (1967: 141) claimed that pertinent to the effectiveness of interest groups is their ability to speak with a united voice, allowing the "ideologies [of the group] to generate solidarity. As mentioned in chapter eight, interest groups themselves may vary in their ethos — some want strict regulation; others support gun ownership for particular purposes — but universal background checks appears to be an objective that all GVP groups and politicians can get behind because it focuses on the *users* of guns rather than controlling guns themselves.

Universal background checks also get the highest level of public support than any other regulatory measure. A nationwide poll carried out by the *Pew Research Center* found that 85% of 1500 adults supported universal background checks (cited in Page, 15th January 2013: News 6A). This support is not particularly partisan either: 86% of Republican and 92% of Democrat supporters were in favour of universal background

checks (McGinty *et al.*, 2013: 253). It seems, therefore, that despite its divorcement from the Sandy Hook shooting itself, background check support has increased as a result of it.

Probably the 'selling point' of this measure is that it will not impinge on law-abiding gun owners. The co-author of a background checks bill, Congressman Mike Thompson, in his opening statement at the *MAIG* No More Names' (2013) event on Capitol Hill gave his own stance on gun ownership: "I will always own guns and I'm strongly in support of the second amendment: if you're law-abiding, I think you should have a gun if you want one." He went on to describe this legislation as "absolutely just common sense," which will not affect current gun owners:

> "Everybody will tell you they don't believe criminals should
> have firearms; they don't believe the dangerously mentally
> ill should have firearms; they don't believe terrorists should
> have firearms. But if you don't do a background check, how
> do you know?"-*MAIG* event 2013

It has been claimed that an issue does not really become a social problem until it is identified as such on the governmental agenda (Anderson 2003; Entman 2007; Kingdon 1994/2003) *and* there is government response to it (Wondemaghen 2013). Accordingly, in early 2013, a federal-level bipartisan proposal was written by Senators Machin (Democrat, West Virginia) and Toomey (Republican, Pennsylvania), requiring background checks for gun shows and internet sales, as well as mandating a felony charge punishable by five years in prison for selling to a prohibited buyer (Hatalsky and Kessler, 2013: 1, 3). *VACPS*'s Andrew Goddard described as a 'compromise bill': "It wasn't a complete universal background checks bill and it had some sweeteners in there for the gun lobby."

As it transpired, the bill failed to pass in first stage of the Senate, because it only received fifty-five votes in favour and the 'filibuster rule' requires a margin of sixty to allow anything to pass through to the House. Several interviewees said their tactics have changed since the bill failed in order to prepare for a 'political battle':

> "We will target vote and get people out of office. We can't
> change the politicians' minds, [but] we can change their

bodies and stick somebody else in there."-Andrew Goddard,
VACPS.

"I don't give a damn about someone like Senator Higgins'
career. If she's not gonna do the right thing, we'll go after
her, [as] she doesn't mean a damn thing to us in comparison
to thirty thousand people losing their lives — that's how we
look at it now."-Ladd Everitt, *CSGV.*

My interviewees, however, were overall quite positive about the success of the bill in future: "It definitely was just round one."-Cathie Whittenburg, *SUPGV. CSGV*'s Ladd Everitt summarised the extent of the post-Sandy Hook shift:

"We've really been primarily focused on two areas: being
able to match the NRA dollar-for-dollar in terms of financing
campaigns — and I think between Mayor Bloomberg's PAC
Mayors Against Illegal Guns and Gabby Gifford's PAC
Americans for Responsible Solutions we're going to pretty
much be able to do that — and political leaders who had
never really focused on the issue [are] now heavily
invested."

The representative from a leading GVP group claimed: "Now you've got all different kinds of voices on the gun violence prevention side and that is a giant step forward." This parallels Kingdon's (1994/2003: 49) hypothesis about the ability of interest group pressure to put items on the government's agenda. In this case, this pressure takes the form of smaller state groups, national ones like *MAIG* and *Brady*, and other prominent forces like *Moms Demand Action* and *Americans for Responsible* Solutions. Moreover, Cathie Whittenburg, *SUPGV*, said that almost all of the affiliated state groups (see *www.supgv.org* for details of these) had managed to get a universal background checks bill introduced into their state legislature since Sandy Hook. It has been said that founder of *MAIG*, Mayor Bloomberg, was instrumental in financing background checks laws in the states of Connecticut, Colorado, Maryland and New York (Scherer, 2013: 44).

One of the most prominent examples of this is Colorado, where two out of the three landmark bills (the third one will be discussed in the next section) signed into law by Governor, John Hickenlooper, in 2013 related to background checks: HB12-1228, universal background checks for all gun sales and transfers; HB13-1229, imposing a fee on gun owners to pay for those background checks. House Representative, Lois Court (Democrat-Denver), claimed that the taxpayer money saved from the second law could be used to fund mental health programs. President Obama praised the measures as 'a model of what's possible' (*Fox 31 Denver* 2013a, 2013b).

Conversely, critics have accused Governor Hickenlooper and other Democrats of being 'puppets' controlled by the *White House* (see figure 15 below for an example of this) (*Fox 31 Denver* 2013b). There was even a call from some counties to secede from Colorado and become a separate stated called 'Northern Colorado'; this measure has since failed (Matthews *et al.*, 2013: 11). The backlash from the new laws has resulted in recall elections for several Colorado senators and, at the moment, two have lost their seats (Scherer, 2013: 44). In a press release, *CC*'s Eileen McCarron described the senators as 'heroes' for commencing "a process of reducing the scope and prevalence of these killings" through legislation (*Colorado Ceasefire* 2013). The controversy caused by these laws indicates that passing legislation does not signal the end of the public debate: "The parties in a conflict deploy different agreements in relation to constantly changing circumstances" (Philo 2007: 179). The new Colorado laws signalled that forms of social control can always be met with resistance in the form of counter-ideologies (van Dijk, 1998a: 130) and counter-movements (Klocke and Muschert, 2010: 13).

Figure 15: Image of Obama controlling Hickenlooper 'puppet.'[88]

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[88] This image was taken from a screenshot during the broadcast news report: *Fox 31 Denver* (2013b) 'Obama: Colorado is a model for nation on gun control,' 3 April. *http://kdvr.com/2013/04/13/obama-says-colorado-is-model-for-nation-on-gun-control.*

10.1.2 Prohibited Persons Criteria

The second main background check issue advised by my gun-related research participants was redefining the criteria for prohibited persons. A specific focus was mental illness, as that seems to be a common factor in school shootings (see, for instance, Newman *et al.* 2004; Newman and Fox 2009). As outlined in chapter one, Virginia law was amended after the shooting to close the mental health criteria loophole; this is an example of a prominent event signalling the presence of a problem (Kingdon, 1994/2003: 16). The common presence of mental illness means school shootings are different from other types of gun violence in the U.S.:

> "I think the school shootings might get into mental health
> more so than your typical American shooting, which is
> somebody getting shot on a street corner in a robbery —
> that's money or drugs. These people [school shooters]:
> they're seriously mentally ill, they're hearing voices." Jim
> Kessler, *TW*.

The description of a less spectacular type of gun violence as 'your typical American shooting' is indicative of how this issue has been 'naturalised' (Fairclough 1989). When I conducted my second round of interviews, the most recent mass shooting, the 'Navy Yard' incident, had just occurred and interviewees used this as an example to highlight flaws in the national background check system:

> "When you've got a guy [Navy Yard shooter] who told the
> police he was hearing voices and had misconduct in the
> military and two gun-related arrests, you're not doing your

job if you allow someone to buy a gun — it's not good
enough." Ladd Everitt, *CSGV*.

"I mean we've just had yet another shooting in Washington
[D.C.]: there were a lot of mental health problems with the
murderer and yet didn't result in him being flagged for a gun
purchase."-Pete Brodnitz, *BSG*.

The usage of 'not good enough' and 'and yet didn't' in these quotes are evaluations
delegitimising social action (Mary and Machin, 2012: 31) and thus fundamental in
highlighting this as a problem.

It was suggested by *BSG*'s Pete Brodnitz that a national mental health database be
created to track prohibited persons; although he claimed that the *NRA* would likely oppose
this. It is also recommended by Ladd Everitt, *CSGV*, that mental health restrictions are
updated to reflect changes in the mental health system:

"The only people disqualified because of mental health
reasons are those who have been forced into a psychiatric
institution or people who have been formally adjudicated by
a court as a danger to themselves and/or others.
Unfortunately, because of how really archaic the mental
health treatment in this country is, very few people who are
dangerously mentally ill fall into one of those two
categories."

In a similar vein, Eileen McCarron, *CC*, said that "the capabilities of the restrictions
already in place need to be expanded." She argued that the specific criteria for firearm
purchase exclusion should focus on the threat posed by individuals:

"We're talking about people who are dangerously mentally
ill; people who have been making threats to others or
confiding in their counsellors that they are thinking of taking

a gun and going out and shooting people."-Eileen McCarron,

CC.

The difficulty in actually implementing such procedures, explained *CC's* Eileen McCarron, lies with concerns about possible stigmatisation of mental illness and possibly discouraging sufferers from seeking treatment (lest they end up on a prohibited list). Attempts to discuss avenues for mental health and guns legislation have been a non-starter in Colorado so far: "We couldn't even get a taskforce to discuss it."-Eileen McCarron, *CC*.

In order to put mental health on the government agenda (see Anderson 2003; Entman 2007; Kingdon 1994/2003), interviewees recommended framing it as a 'public health issue' (see Kohn, 2004; Spitzer, 2004) centred around school and other types of mass shootings. When it comes to school shooters, it is possible that putting barriers in the way of those who are mentally ill and have the potential to act violently could allow for interventionary efforts to help the individual before it culminates in a shooting incident. This is particularly important in the case of internal school shooters at colleges and universities, for their longer lives means the advancement of psychiatric conditions to a more severe state than internal high and middle school attackers (Newman and Fox, 2009: 1304). A staring point to this frame, suggested *BSG*'s Pete Brodnitz, is the idea that mental health itself is a broader 'public health' issue utilising 'thematic framing' (Iyengar 1991): "For example, company [medical treatment] benefits, you'd get physical, some kind of vision and dental, [but] mental, I don't think so." The issue of mental health and guns would then have to be based on a reconceptualisation of public safety: "Seeing a spike in these mass [shooting] incidents — that's our argument and, I think, without that it's gonna be almost impossible to get anything done."-Pete Brodnitz, *BSG*.

Moreover, Jim Kessler, *TW,* contended that citizens themselves could help by monitoring those closest to them: "Is there someone in your home who has severe mental illness; there are all sorts of precautions that you should be taking to make sure [untoward] things don't happen." This makes sense when considering Swanson *et al.*'s (2013: 36) point that those with mental illnesses which make them dangerous often do not seek treatment before they carry out violent actions. Notably, the Virginia Tech shooter did not pursue treatment on his own; rather, it was his remark to his suitemates "I might as well kill myself" that resulted in him getting mentally assessed (*Virginia Tech Review Panel*, 2007/2009: 24).

10.2 Assault Weapons and Magazine Rounds

This section assesses the other gun regulatory measures my research participants highlighted as ways to reduce school and other types of mass shootings: restricting assault weapons and large capacity magazines. These both played a role in the two case studies, where semiautomatic weapons and large capacity magazines were used, allowing for more rounds to be fired in rapid succession. The first section will deliberate the assault weapons ban and note it is a more divisive issue than background checks. The second half will discuss the apparently more viable policy option of limiting large capacity magazines, drawing upon its levels of public support and recent action in Colorado.

10.2.1 The Federal Assault Weapons Ban

It has been argued that "the absence of a semiautomatic firearm reduces the likelihood that a school shooting might be turned into a mass murder" because of the killing power of these types of guns (Levin and Madfis, 2009: 1240). Semiautomatic guns have been described as "a modification of military weapons" (Volokh, 2009: 1447). Such weapons differ from regular handguns in that they automatically load a magazine into firing position; although they still require the trigger to be pulled with each shot, unlike a machine gun where rounds of bullets spray with the finger just being on the trigger (Kleck, 1997: 23-24). One way to regulate semiautomatic weapons is by renewing the ten year old ban in Title XI of the 'Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act' (1994) — most commonly known as the federal 'assault weapons' ban[89] — that expired under George W Bush's administration back in 2004. *TW*'s Jim Kessler helped write this law and had to define what an 'assault weapon' was based on what a gun could:

> "The most obvious thing is when you pull the trigger and let
> it go the next round goes into the chamber: that's the semi-
> automatic part. That's almost every gun. So, it's got to be

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[89] This law will be referred to in this way from now on.

one that can take a detachable clip and one that you hold like
a rifle and so on."

The ban ended up being very specific in the types of weapons that were prohibited based on accessories like threaded barrels, pistol grips, and ammunition magazines.

There was quite a bit of criticism levelled at the law. Winkler (2009: 1555) described it as 'irrational' because it meant that a number of firearms meeting the definition of an 'assault weapon' did not fall under the rubric of the law. Moreover, it was possible for the 'banned weapons' to be transformed into a 'legal copy' by removing certain cosmetic features (Volokh, 2009: 1468, 1484). Weapons manufactured before the law was implemented were 'grandfathered' making them legal to own and transfer (Roth and Koper, 1999: 9). A study (Roth and Koper 1999) into the preliminary two year impact of the ban found that the production of banned weapons increased before the law was effective, making them initially more available.

For those reasons, it has been said that the ban only had 'mixed effects' on reducing crime levels (Koper, 2013: 159-160) To clarify, it appears that there was a decline in criminal use of the banned weapons; however, its overall impact is unclear due to grandfathered assault weapons and similar substitute guns being available such as semiautomatic handguns (Roth and Koper 1999). *VACPS*'s Andrew Goddard argued that the ban could have been improved by applying machine gun regulations to semi-automatic weapons: registering and storing them securely and informing the police where they are kept. Cathie Whittenburg, *SUPGV*, made a similar point: "Machine guns are not used in crimes because people who own those guns are held responsible for them: I would like to see that for semi-automatics."

Public opinion in early 2013 around renewing the 'assault weapons ban' seemed to be mixed, probably due to the fact that this regulatory strategy focuses directly on regulating guns. A study by McGinty *et al.* (2013) found that 69% of thirty-four and a half thousand people supported a ban on assault weapons. This support was highly polarised: 77% were non-gun owners; 46% were gun owners; 15% were members of the *National Rifle Association* (McGinty *et al.*, 2013: 214-215). Moreover, a *Pew Research Center* poll of 1500 participants discovered that support was split 84% and 44% for Democrats and Republicans respectively; it is also a gendered issue, with two-thirds of females in favour

of a ban compared to fewer than half of the men sampled (cited in Page, January 2013: News 6A).

White House petitions filed a few days after the Sandy Hook shooting also demonstrated the divisiveness of this issue. The one advocating renewing the 'assault weapons ban' totalled fewer than 4000[90] signatures (*White House Petition* 2012a). The petition drew upon notions of potential victimisation via the innocent 'symbolic victim' (Altheide 2002b; Garland 2001), maintaining that the ban would protect "innocent Americans, who just by being in a public gathering place in the course of normal daily life could become a victim." Conversely, a few lodged petitions centred on *not* reinstating an assault weapons ban. One *White House Petition* (2012b), with well over 8000 signatures[91], heavily drew upon the individual rights paradigm with the call to: "Not punish the tens of millions of law-abiding gun owners with ineffective and unconstitutional 'assault weapons' bans." The other *White House Petition* (2012c), standing at almost 10,000 signatures[92], stated that such a ban was 'unconstitutional' and "If we do not stand up for our ownership and rights now, they WILL be taken away." In actual fact, Rosenthal and Winkler (2013) came to the conclusion that such a ban would be 'constitutional' under the parameters of the Supreme Court ruling. It was also maintained in the *U.S. Court of Appeals* in a challenge that an assault weapons ban does not "prevent a person from keeping a suitable and commonly used weapon for protection in the home or for hunting" (*Heller et al. V. District of Columbia,* D.C. Cir. 2011; 4b 32, 4b 31).

On the 19th March 2013, the 'assault weapons' portion of the Obama administration's gun regulation package was removed, with the Senate citing a lack of votes as the main reason (*BBC News* 2013). Its failure in the Senate and lack of 'policy demand' (see Anderson 2003) for it nationally suggests there will be difficulty in getting it passed at the federal-level; despite modest public support for the issue. Similarly, interviewees were doubtful that the ban would ever be passed again in future. The representative from the leading GVP group surmised that assault weapons bans in future would have to come down to individual states rather than at the federal-level. Pete Brodnitz, *BSG*, said even then it would depend upon campaign funding:

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[90] 3755 when I checked it in summer 2013; this may have increased since then.
[91] 8652 as of summer 2013.
[92] 9545 as of summer 2013.

> "So, if you have a heavily Democratic state but the campaign
> laws allow for large campaign efforts and larger
> contributions to campaigns by outside sources, then I could
> see people still being afraid to be overly aggressive because
> of that amount of outside money that could curtail."

10.2.2 Large Capacity Magazines

The most useful aspect of the assault weapons ban was said to be its limitation of large capacity magazines to ten rounds; this is also likely to gain more public support than banning assault weapons (Koper 2013: 159, 168). Correspondingly, a study carried out by McGinty *et al.* (2013) found that 68% of thirty-four and a half thousand supported reinstating the large capacity magazine portion of the assault weapons ban.

This would certainly be something that could have a substantial impact on reducing the carnage of mass shootings. Andrew Goddard, *VACPS* drew a link between school and other mass shootings and large capacity magazines: "The more rounds you can fire without reloading, the more victims you can create." The Columbine crime scene investigation concluded that the perpetrators had fired over hundred and eighty-eight rounds during the course of the shooting which lasted just under an hour (*Jefferson County Sheriff* n.d.). The *Virginia Tech* shooter used a magazine holding thirty bullets and ended up firing one hundred and seventy four rounds (*Virginia Tech Review Panel*, 2007/2009: 30;Spitzer, 2012: xi, xiii). At the *MAIG* (2013) event, a survivor of a mass shooting in Tuscon, Arizona (2011) explained how the perpetrator stopping to reload his weapon allowed people to overpower him:

> "The gunman was there right in front of me reaching for his
> clip and Pat, who was standing there, grabbed it out his
> hands. I just hit him as hard as I could and he went down and
> hit the sidewalk; Roger, another one who was there, jumped
> on his back and I held him for ten minutes until law
> enforcement arrived."

In Colorado, a bill (HB13-1224) signed into law in 2013 by Governor Hickenlooper limited gun ammunition magazines to fifteen rounds (*Fox 31 Denver* 2013). The importance of this issue to voters was said to be evident in the 2012 Colorado election: "Candidates reported that they were being asked about 'what are you going to do about assault weapons?'"-Eileen McCarron, *CC*. The combination of three factors in Colorado, argued *CC*'s Eileen McCarron, led to the optimum climate for legislative change: the November election that changed the configuration of the Colorado Legislature; the cinema shooting in Aurora, Colorado (July 2012); and the Sandy Hook shooting (December 2012).

Counterchallenging forces to the 2013 Colorado law have emerged once again. Senator, Greg Brophy (Republican-Wray), showed condemnation for Governor, John Hickenlooper: "I am so committed to making sure he isn't re-elected in 2014. Colorado deserves a Governor that has Colorado values not East Coast values" (quoted in *Fox 31 Denver* 2013) — such a comment is framing the law as an infraction upon Colorado's traditional, Western state values. One of the counterarguments to the law is that it violates the 'Americans with Disabilities Act' (1990), as certain disabilities may limit people from changing magazines quickly if needed in a situation of self-defence (Coffman 2013). Legal scholar Sangero (2006, 2010), however, maintained that 'proportionality' is a key requirement for defensive force to be used, where only the minimum amount necessary should be used by the defender; it is questionable whether this would extend to tens of rounds, given until the 1980s police officers used to generally be armed with revolvers consisting of only six rounds and this was seen as adequate for self-defence (Volokh, 2009: 1489). Further challenges come in the form of a gun rights interest group which has formed, *Concerned Citizens for a Safer Colorado* (*CCSC*) (see *http://asafercolorado.com/*). The main strategy of this group is to collect signatures in a petition to overturn the magazine ban and framing it as hindering 'self-defence.' These counter-ideologies forming the resistance movement (van Dijk, 1998a: 130) are rooted in the 'individual rights' paradigm, drawing upon notions of self-protection. Clearly, the results of this challenge will all come down to which group has the 'power to define' and hence disallow alternatives (Shore and Wright, 1990: 18).

CC's Eileen McCarron said her group will be challenging *CCSC* by encouraging people not to sign the petition and will likely partake in debates arguing that high capacity magazines do not have any useful purpose. Frustration was expressed at the countermovement:

> "I'm just really sorry to see that people are more interested in keeping their high-capacity magazines and assault weapons than they are in evaluating — and trying — methods to save people's lives."-Eileen McCarron, *CC*.

As it transpired, *CCSC* did not turn in the signatures required to start to by the due date of December 2013; thereby, eradicating the initiative (*Colorado Ceasefire* 2014). Moreover, attempts in the Colorado state legislature to repeal the magazine limit faltered in early 2014 (Marcus 2014).

Conclusion

What this chapter aimed to do is interrogate ways to move forward with gun policy specifically to reduce school shootings or the severity of incidents. The suggestions of gun-related research participants relating to background checks and assault weapons provide the foundations for this debate. Indicators of public support go some way to demonstrating the viability of the proposals. Results were retrieved from a number of sources: interviews with interest groups, a think tank director with experience of writing gun legislation and a political pollster who worked with the Virginia Governor at the time of the Virginia Tech shooting; *White House* petitions and public opinion polls; speakers at the *MAIG* event (2013) on Capitol Hill.

Universal background checks hold the most promise for gaining policy traction. Interviewees advocated requiring a background check for every gun purchase as a means to reduce both school shootings and general gun violence. It is a goal that GVP groups appeared to have united on after Sandy Hook, even though this would not have prevented that particular shooting. This shows the importance of 'focusing events' for putting issues onto the policy agenda (Birkland 1997; Kingdon 1993/2004), resulting in new gun violence prevention groups, more funding and public support.). Despite not having a clear link to background checks, Sandy Hook has mobilised public support for this policy measure. The introduction of a universal background checks bill into the Senate in spring 2013 shows this issue has been identified and acted upon as a 'social problem' (Anderson

2003; Best 1995; Entman 1993, 2007). The bill failed by a narrow margin; however, interviewees were hopeful this will be successful if reintroduced in future. The 'single voice' of the objective for all GVP interest groups should generate solidarity and improve their chances of success (Berger and Luckman, 1967: 141). This measure appears to have a higher chance of gaining public backing because it does not affect gun owners in any way: it is about regulating *who* can buy and own guns, rather than controlling guns themselves. This is reflected in high, non-partisan levels of public support.

The second background check issue of redefining the criteria of prohibited persons, especially relating to mental health, holds promise since mental health issues are a commonality in school shootings (Newman *et al.* 2004; Newman and Fox 2009). My interviewees outlined some problems in the current mental health definition and explained it may be difficult to get this changed because of concerns about stigmatisation and deterring people from seeking treatment. Since issues compete to be recognised as social problems (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Best 1995), the mental health aspect would have to be framed in a particular way to give it salience (Entman 1993, 2007). My interviewees recommended framing it as a 'public health issue' by elucidating the current weaknesses with mental health treatment more generally and highlighting mental illness as a causal factor in mass shootings.

The second section focused on restricting assault weapons and magazine clips. Since these are focusing on the capabilities of guns as objects, they are more divisive measures than background checks. Renewing the 'assault weapons ban' (1994-2004) is probably the least viable suggestion; despite the common use of semiautomatic firearms in school and other mass shootings. Polls show this is a partisan and gendered issue with females and Democrats being the most likely supporters. It could be surmised that restricting assault weapons will likely fall to individual states based on their ability to pass gun regulation and public support for the proposals.

A slightly more viable policy option would be to limit large capacity clips allowing for multiple rounds to be fired in quick succession. The outrage the 2013 Colorado law limiting magazine clips to fifteen rounds has caused is indicative of the divisive nature of this measure. The counter-ideological resistance (van Dijk 1998a) to the Colorado law argued it is 'unconstitutional' because it impinges on self-defence efforts, showing the entrenchment of this ideal in 'individual rights' interpretations of the second amendment (see Cornell 2006; Kates 1992). As chapter nine demonstrated, the reliance on individuals

to defend themselves seems to have some grounding in doubts about law enforcement's ability to protect people. Considering this alongside the growth of self-defence movements like 'concealed carry on campus' and the sporting need to fire multiple rounds, it may be the case that large capacity clips are just too divisive an issue to pass. A possible way to create 'policy demand' (Anderson 2003) for this would be to re-emphasise that the shooter having to reload is an opportunity to try and stop them, as transpired in the Tuscon (2011) mass shooting. These incidences of stopping the shooter, however, may be too rare to actually be persuasive or it may just reinforce existing frames (Callaghan 2005; Entman 1993) such as arming citizens to stop the shooter.

This chapter discussed and interrogated prescriptive proposals for their ability to gain policy traction. With the area of policy focus now set up, the next chapter will turn to look at whether gun regulation is possible in the current political and legal arena and suggestions from research participants about alternative ways to frame the issue of gun violence.

11. Current Political Terrain: Is Gun Regulation Achievable?

Introduction

Keeping in mind Edelman's (1964: 105) claim that "unless an appropriate political setting has been created...a group interest cannot be expressed in policy, assessing current political terrain is vital to making projections for the future. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold in nature: addressing the constitutional parameters for gun regulation set by the *Heller* ruling and reinforced by the *McDonald* case (refer back to chapter eight for background context on these; as well as an overview of landmark legislative decisions are available in appendix E); the feelings of the public on gun regulations and strategies GVP interest groups are pursing to reframe the issue of gun violence prevention.

The majority of findings for this chapter come from interview results with gun violence prevention groups and the 'No More Names' protest held by the political action committee *Mayors Against Illegal Guns*. Additional materials were retrieved from *YouTube* video comments (June 2012-2013) and *White House* petitions. Findings are located within theories pertaining to: framing (Aaroe 2011; Callaghan 2005; Entman 1993, 2007; Iyengar 1991; Gross 2008); ideologies (Fairclough 1989; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012); policy-making (Anderson 2003; Best 1995; Fischer 2003; Kingdon 1993/2004); nationalism (Billig 1991; Calhoun 1997; Edensor 2002); American gun culture (Kohn 2004; Squires 2000).

In the first section, the *Heller* and *McDonald* Supreme Court rulings eradicating the possibility of a gun ban by will be contrasted with the extreme 'paranoid style' (Hofstader 1963) arguments about gun confiscation still circulating in *YouTube* discourses. The future of the second amendment in a post-*Heller* and *McDonald* context will be critiqued. The second section starts by interrogating why the U.S. public does not like the term 'gun control,' relating this to gun culture and history. I then examine public sentiment following the shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school, which has, in allowing change, acted as a 'focusing event' (Birkland 1997; Kingdon 1993/2004). The current strategies of GVP interest groups to reframe this issue in order to create 'policy demand' (Anderson 2003) are then provided: the personal approach, emphasising the emotional dimension of gun violence; bullet control, which regulates ammunitions rather than guns; rights and responsibilities, promoting the right to bear arms with the need for public safety.

11.1 The Supreme Court Rulings

This section will detail the implications of the *Heller* (2008) and *McDonald* (2010) Supreme Court rulings. First, this section will discuss the presence of the 'slippery slope' argument, despite this being eradicated by the *Heller* decision. Following that, the future of the second amendment in a post-*Heller* and *McDonald* context will be discussed.

11.1.1 The Continuing Presence of the 'Slippery Slope' Argument

To begin with*, Heller* overturned the Washington, D.C. handgun ban on the basis that the second amendment protected an individual right to self-defence. In 2010, *McDonald* cemented the rights of states to the *Heller* decision that the second amendment protects a right to keep and bear arms. These cases adhere to Spitzer's (2004: 15) point that: "The courts provide a key avenue for definition and change of the [gun regulation] issue." What is achievable and constitutional in terms of gun regulation now has some boundaries.

In the case of gun regulation, the 'slippery slope' is construed as "any new gun law is a slippery slope that will lead to gun confiscation."-Pete Brodnitz, *BSG*. This type of argument is fallacious in nature because it surmises about more extreme consequences for which there is no basis (McClurg, 1992: 85). The fundamental consequence of *Heller* is an outright blanket ban on firearms — like the one in the U.K. (previously documented by Squires 2000, 2010; Squires *et al.* 2008) — is constitutionally forbidden. As Winkler (2009: 1575) pointed out, the prevalence of gun ownership in the U.S. and the high likelihood that most gun owners would refuse to turn over their guns means a ban is insurmountable from a practical sense anyway. The constitutional parameters placed on the gun regulation by the *Heller* decision have technically rendered the 'slippery slope' argument obsolete.

Despite this, my interviewees coincided on the point that the *Heller* decision is generally ignored by all actors involved in the debate: "The Supreme Court [*Heller*] decision, I thought, was a good decision: it was balanced. But both sides [gun regulation and gun lobby] pretend like it doesn't exist."-Jim Kessler, *TW*. Jim Kessler, *TW*, explained

that the American public do not seem to be aware of the decision either: "We're a lot less informed in this country than people are in Scotland, I'm sure: this country is just too big to be informed about everything." Furthermore, several interviewees claimed the 'gun ban' component of the 'slippery slope' fallacy is still used to mobilise support for the gun lobby: "The other side still insists one false move and they're going to come and take away guns."-Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*; "They [gun lobby] never talk about the fact that included in the [*Heller*] decision that you can't have any gun anywhere and it needs to be regulated."-Cathie Whittenburg, *SUPGV*. *CSGV*'s Ladd Everitt used the example of a recent television interview with the *NRA*'s vice-president, Wayne LaPierre, who did not answer when asked "Is this the end of the gun control debate?" The motivation for ignoring the question was purported to be strategic:

> "If he [LaPierre] told people it was the end of the gun control debate, they'd lose a lot of business: people wouldn't be stockpiling AR15s and carry guns; he didn't answer that question for a purpose. So, they're going to keep pushing the confiscation myth: we'll end up like the UK — the government will kick down your doors and take your guns…they need to keep people scared."-Ladd Everitt, *CSGV*.

The threat propagated of 'ending up like the UK' shows it is internationally renowned for having restrictive gun laws (Squires *et al.*, 2008: 10). Such charges position the gun lobby in the role of 'fear mongers' (Glassner 2004), employing fear of gun confiscations and bans. The use of the 'slippery slope' argument in its more extreme form (gun confiscation and ban) puts one in mind of Hofstader's (1963) 'paranoid style' thesis: this utilises the clinical definition of 'paranoia' to conceptualise a type of far right-wing political rhetoric. This state of 'paranoia' is aroused by irreconcilable differences in political opinions and based on feelings of persecution, suspicion and paranoia (Hofstader, 1963: 4, 39).

This was evident in *YouTube* discussions (June 2012-2013), where some users referred to Nazi Germany, Russia and China disarming its citizens in order to oppress them and commonly invoking the 'individual rights paradigm' component that the second

amendment allows the citizens to challenge a tyrannical government. (Spitzer, 2012: 42). As Hofstader (1970/2011: 7) explains it: "It is the idea that popular access to arms is an important counterpoise to tyranny"; herein lies the basis for 'insurrectionist' rhetoric. Interviewee, Ladd Everitt, *CSGV*, summarised it in the following way: "It's the belief— now a belief—that the second amendment gives them an individual right to basically shoot to kill government officials when they believe that the government has become court-to-court radical." It is claimed, however, that the Constitution Framers distinguished between 'revolutions,' by the people for the good of the collective and 'insurrection,' resistance by a faction (Williams, 2003: 57). My interviewees were all very critical of insurrectionist philosophy: "I find [it] bordering on treason myself: to take arms against your government… [it's] questionable, questionable patriotism."-Eileen McCarron, *CC;* "[Insurrectionism is] an idea that our Founding Fathers defined as the crime of treason."-Ladd Everitt, *CSGV*. In a similar vein, Spitzer (2012: 43) pointed out the Constitution, in articles I and III respectively, clearly states that militias are intended to 'suppress insurrections' and that the crime of treason is 'levying war' against one's government.

More extreme *YouTube* comments centred on conspiracy theories stating that Virginia Tech and Columbine shootings, as well as other events like Sandy Hook and the Aurora Theatre, were all staged by the government to ban guns. Statements like this once again evoke Hofstader's (1963) 'paranoid style' thesis. Catastrophes — in this case, intense fear that the government is corrupt or may become tyrannical — tend to amplify feelings of persecution and paranoia. This involves construing 'facts' in a way that fits with a 'vast' conspiracy theory (Hofstader, 1963: 29, 39).

11.1.2 The Future of the Second Amendment

Even with the 'slippery slope' argument still circulating and the *Heller* ruling being overlooked in public discourse, the fact remains that the decision represents a turning point in the gun debate: "It establishes a new shape for the arena in which legal and political struggle over guns and gun control will be fought" (Doherty, 2008: xviii). What is slightly problematic though is the ruling did not rigorously examine what could be considered 'unconstitutional' in terms of gun regulations (Rosenthal and Winkler, 2013: 228) or the connection between the pre-ambular 'well-regulated militia' to the 'right of the people to keep and bear arms.' (Lund, 2009: 1347) As a potential solution, *BSG*'s Pete

Brodnitz suggested modifying the second amendment for clarity: "What do you mean by 'well-regulated militias': does that include regulation of the arms?" He acknowledged, however, that such a movement would need to be citizen driven, as it is highly unlikely a politician would take on this polarised issue. If it were ever to happen, the case would likely be presented to the Supreme Court to explicate the exact meaning of the second amendment; with a clear set of guidelines of what is considered constitutional.

The future implications of the *Heller* and *McDonald* decisions require careful consideration. Previous court rulings all advocated in favour of the 'states right' interpretation of the second amendment, which Spitzer (2012: 39) believes "lends credence to the criticism that the *Heller* ruling played fast and loose with history." Also, the *Heller* and *McDonald* decisions were not unanimous, with the voting being five for and four against in both cases. The narrow victory of these cases means that Doherty's (2008: 115) argument that "most existing gun regulations and lots of future gun regulation may well survive *Heller*" seems rather convincing. Further adding to this, almost all of the challenges to gun laws brought forward in lower courts since the *Heller* ruling — such as *McDonald*'s challenge to Chicago's gun law, which is extremely similar to the one the District of Columbia had and abolished after *Heller* — have tended to be unsuccessful. The representative from a leading GVP group with whom I spoke made reference to an on-going litigation campaign ensuring the *Heller* decision gets interpreted the correct way:

> "Yes, there is a limited right to have a handgun in the home
> for self-defence, but that does not mean that we can't keep
> guns from felons or domestic violence abusers; it means that
> there can be time or place restrictions [and] restrictions on
> extra dangerous guns."

Probably the most important point to take from a post-*Heller* and *McDonald* world is that the self-defence principle must always be taken into consideration when proposing future federal and state gun regulations, alongside whether the benefit to public safety is compelling enough reason for enforcing a restriction, i.e. prohibiting dangerous groups owning guns and not allowing firearms in government buildings. Volokh (2009: 1446-1447) theorised that Courts will likely take into account whether regulations are a 'burden'

or an 'infringement': the former is acceptable in the case of reducing danger and does not infringe the right to self-defence as outlined in *Heller*. Further, it was theorised by Sangero (2010: 457) that the criteria for post-*Heller* regulation should focus on what is needed for self-defence purposes: the 'necessity' and 'proportionality' of defensive force, where only the required amount is used in a life-threatening situation. In that case, it may be that certain types of firearms are *excessive* for the purpose of necessary and proportional defensive force.

11.2 Public and Guns

The public are important because citizens' concerns provide the foundations for issues to be covered (Burns and Crawford, 1999: 160). When it comes to an issue like gun regulation, public support for change must be linked to social norms and values at that moment in time (Spitzer, 2004: 15). This section will discuss why the term 'gun control' is problematic and alternative names now being employed by GVP interest groups. Following that, the shift in public sentiment after Sandy Hook will be outlined.

11.2.1 The Problem with 'Gun Control'

Since metaphors have been said to be particularly persuasive linguistic tools (Semino, 2008: 85) and discourse influences decision-making by making premises for arguments (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 3), the use of the phrase 'gun control' seems to be contributing to incomplete understandings of what gun regulation would actually do. Discussions with my interviewees elucidated why this was the case:

> "Gun control, as far as most of us [GVP groups] are concerned, is a dead term because it's been completely and utterly misunderstood and misrepresented; it means so many different things to different people that it's a useless phrase."-Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*.

The representative from a leading GVP group explained why they thought this phrase was commonly misconstrued: "To a gun owner that means 'you want to take my guns or tell me what to do.'" Notably, it appears the word 'control' is the problematic element: "I think if you put 'control' in front of anything in America, it doesn't work."-Jim Kessler, *TW*.

At the crux of the gun debate in the United States is the notion of American identity and what it means to people. Anderson (1991) described nations as 'imagined communities,' where most members are only bonded by symbols, history and culture. The collective identity is thus important here: "Nationalism has emotional power because it helps to make us *who* we are" (Calhoun, 1997: 3; emphasis added). In the US, nationalist discourse is entrenched in ideals of 'rights,' 'freedom,' and 'equality' (Lasswell *et al.* 1949: 12) — it is clear that these underpin the thinking behind what gun control means. The conflation of these ideals with the American identity was something highlighted by my interviewees: "Individual rights and freedom are central to the American identity."-Ladd Everitt, *CSGV*; "We have a real history of freedom and liberty…it's more a part of America's history than just about any country."-Jim Kessler, *TW*. During the course of her research into shooters' relationship with guns, Kohn (2004: 61) found that guns tended to symbolise positive attributes such as 'independence,' 'freedom' and 'civic responsibility.' These results indicate that there does exist some correlation between guns and one's national identity, where using them may be seen as a means of 'performing' it (Billig 1991; Edensor 2002). The representative from a leading GVP group claimed that such ideals have been translated into a 'marketing strategy' for gun ownership: "The idea that it's American and patriotic and you're doing your duty." This fits under the rubric of 'nationalism as evaluation' where political and cultural ideologies claim superiority for a particular nation (Calhoun, 1997: 6), i.e. the notion that gun ownership allows America to be a free country.

Since social and cultural factors of a society contribute to how a particular issue is interpreted (Fischer: 2003, 129), the assessment by some members of the general public and gun rights advocates seems to be that 'gun control' translates into challenges to 'freedom' and 'rights.' Lasswell *et al.* (1949: 8) theorised that the 'political function of language' impacts upon citizens' decision making. Likewise, EdeLman's (1959) 'symbolic politics' thesis maintained language and perceptions can be shaped to political advantage. Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*, argued that the American link to guns needs to be redefined: "We need to change perceptions of a gun as a tool again and not something that apparently

is as emotive as the flag."All my gun-related interviewees coincided on the idea that 'gun control' is now being replaced by more neutral terms: "Gun control: those words have gone down tremendously in favour, so we don't use them anymore: we use 'gun violence prevention.'"-Cathie Whittenburg, *SUPGV*; "We've really latched onto 'gun violence prevention' – GVP – in the trade and I think this is a much better term."-Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*. Similarly, a think tank aiming to "neutralize left-wing bias in the media," *Media Research Center* (March 2013), tracked media trends since Sandy Hook and discovered the more 'neutral' term 'gun reform' has been used to refer to legislation that would usually be called 'gun control,' appearing a total of twenty-three times in the *Los Angeles Times, New York Times* and *Washington Post*. This might be the way this issue is represented in public discourses from now on: "It's [GVP term] becoming the norm that we use that now. If you hear somebody now writing about 'gun control,' you know that they're either against it or somebody who is new to this."-Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*.

11.2.2 Gun Violence: A Diminished Issue?

In the first stage of interviews held in autumn 2012, my interviewees claimed that gun reform had diminished in importance for the public. A *Gallup* poll of 1,005 adults nationwide showed 55% of respondents were in support of lessening gun laws or keeping them as they were (Jones 2011). This seems paradoxical when one considers the polling data showing support for *specific* gun regulations —these were outlined throughout the subsections on background checks and the assault weapons ban. Another problem, explained *BSG*'s Pete Brodnitz, is that whilst people generally support gun reform, other issues take priority when it comes to voting: "People vote on jobs, taxes, education, maybe healthcare, how much they like the opponent; there are so many other things that tend to come before guns." It would really need to gain status as a 'social problem' for any action to be taken on it (Best 1995; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Wondemaghen 2013).

To take this argument further, I would like to draw a distinction between various types of 'gun crime' or 'gun violence.' These tend to be consolidated for advocacy purposes and policy responses to form a set of incidents that can be understood in relation with each other; the reality is they can take various forms (Squires 2008). In 2011, there were 32,163 gun-related deaths in the United States, 11,101 of which were homicides (*Gun Policy* 2013). These made up what Andrew Goddard, *VACPS,* calls the 'daily grind' of shootings,

such as isolated incidents, suicides, accidents, and single victim attacks: "There were thirty-two people who died at Virginia Tech; thirty-two people die every single day here."

The incidents which seem to gain attention are 'mass shootings' involving the non-state-sponsored (i.e. not for political or ideological goals) killing of multiple victims, often in public locations chosen for symbolic value and/or their availability of potential victims (Levin and Madfis, 2009: 1227, 1240). It excludes shooting incidents like: gang-related and drive-by shootings, robberies, multiple victim attacks using other weapons, hostage-taking and domestic abuse incidents (Kelly, 2012: 10). The *MAIG* event I attended on Capitol Hill was part of a 'No More Names' bus tours which went round the U.S. and read out the names of all gun victims since the Sandy Hook shooting, with numbers increasing steadily as time went on. The majority of victims on the list were the more commonplace gun deaths, such as robberies, gang fighting and single victim incidents. Speakers at the *MAIG* event, however, were survivors or victims' families from mass shootings like Tuscon, Arizona (2011), Aurora, Colorado (2012), and the Sandy Hook (2012) school shooting. These people are high profile and saturated news coverage around these events provides context to the shooting, so their call for improved background checks is perhaps more memorable. Mass shootings can also have the effect of reinforcing existing schemata (mentally stored ideas) (Entman, 1993: 53), as illustrated in an anecdote from *CC*'s Eileen McCarron about receiving an email blaming concealed carry restrictions for the Aurora Theatre mass shooting:

> "One guy wrote: 'You should be ashamed of yourself. I hope
> you have many sleepless nights knowing that your laws
> killed numerous innocent people…One single person in that
> theatre with a legal concealed carry permit could have
> stopped the massacre. God rest their souls.'"

Something else noticeable about mass shootings is they tend to involve innocent people going about their 'routine activities,' like attending school, work or going to see a film, and who are randomly targeted for being in that place (Levin and Madfis, 2009: 1240). This perhaps makes them more 'relatable' and concrete (Henry and Lanier, 1998: 620) than a gun violence victim who was killed based on their involvement in things such as drug or gang violence. This also creates the feeling that 'It could be you' (Garland,

2001: 144). What makes this even more horrific in the case of school shootings is the involvement of children and young adults. It has been said the perceived seriousness of a crime is also related to *who* the victims were (Henry, 2000: 23), as there exists "differences in importance attached to human life... [defined by] socially constructed differences created between those we can identify with and 'others' who we cannot" (Henry and Lanier, 1998: 620). With school shootings, the students are attending school as they are supposed to and teaching and administrative staff are doing their jobs. Consequently, these groups are just following their daily routine and thus were in the 'right place' at the 'wrong time,' perhaps making these groups easier to relate to and increasing the perceived severity of the crime.

In spite of this, my interviewees argued that even well-publicised school shootings and other mass shootings only have a short-term impact on people's opinions. Eileen McCarron, CC, pointed to a general public complacency:

> "I think that mass shootings are becoming so common that
> people have become a little inured to it and think 'another
> mass shooting: there's nothing we can do except comfort the
> families, grieve the dead, heal the wounded and go on.'"

A possible contributing factor could be the lack of media coverage about less 'spectacular' mass shootings: "Even these mass events [shootings] apparently don't always generate news coverage."-Pete Brodnitz, *BSG*. This supports Eldridge's (1995: 52) argument about the power of the media to 'set agendas' by defining and transmitting what is considered normal. The fact that some shootings are not even gaining media coverage shows they are becoming 'normalised' (see Glassner 2004) to some extent by not being unusual enough to be 'newsworthy.'

11.2.3 Post Sandy Hook Sentiment

With the previous sub-section setting up the lack of public concern about gun violence in autumn 2012, the argument will then shift to document the momentous changes following

the Sandy Hook shooting in December 2012. This event acted as a 'focusing event' (Birkland 1997) allowing for the political, policy and problem streams to combine (Kingdon 1993/2004). An emergent theme from interviews conducted in the summer and autumn of 2013 was that this particular event had caused a shift in public sentiment even from a year ago; this parallels Garland's (2001: 111-112) argument that political initiatives tend to be triggered by atypical and shocking events. The very young age of the Sandy Hook shooting victims was said to be the main influential factor:

> "It made it a lot simpler: I think people might not be able to imagine themselves in certain circumstances; but when they see twenty dead five and six year olds, I think there's nobody who can't relate to that."-Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*.

This adheres to Henry's (2000: 23) point that the assumed severity of a crime correlates to *who* the victims were. The vulnerability of children also means that they are more compatible with elements of the 'victim identity' (see Altheide 2002a; Furedi 2007). Children potentially becoming victims of gun violence was something which became of particular concern to parents with the growth of new groups like *Moms Demand Action* (see *http://momsdemandaction.org*).

Since the process of framing begins with an assessment of the 'public mood' at that moment (Gabrielson, 2005: 79), the post Sandy Hook momentum, therefore, has allowed for gun violence prevention groups to reframe this issue as one predicated on safety. A speaker at the *MAIG* event (2013) described gun regulation in this way: "It's no longer about 'gun control'; it's about background checks and the loopholes in our system that jeopardise public safety." The public reaction to Sandy Hook has been slightly fragmented. For instance, there is a *White House* petition, created on the day of the Sandy Hook shooting consisting of over 3500 signatures[93]. This is entitled 'No more gun control' and described gun regulation as only serving to "disarm those who are law abiding citizens in order to have 'feel good' legislation." The normalisation of this individual rights interpretation as something which is so imbedded it is seen as 'common sense' (Mayr and Machin 2012) is evident in the 'defeatist' argument presented in the petition: "We will

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[93]3519 as of summer 2013.

continue to have a Columbine…and school killings even if legislation is passed further restricting gun rights."

By contrast, looking at *White House* petitions created on the day of the Sandy Hook shooting finds support was certainly gaining traction with 36,143 and 24,823 signatures[94] respectively. The first one directly used the Sandy Hook shooting to invoke support for stricter gun laws, stating "If a day on which two dozen schoolchildren are massacred is not the day to discuss this, there never will be a proper day for the discussion." This argument is drawing upon this shocking and tragic but atypical event to define the problem by calling attention to some aspects of reality (Entman, 1993: 52): the increasing nature of mass shootings, whilst obscuring others, such as the more commonplace shootings. The second petition criticised politicians for having "their hands in the pockets of one of the richest lobbying organizations in the country [the *NRA*]" and called for a 'time to be set' to discuss gun control. This is clearly setting a link between the financial resources of the *NRA* and the lack of gun regulation, hence 'diagnosing' the 'causes' of the problem (Entman, 1993: 52).

Whilst Sandy Hook allowed 'gun violence' to appear in the social arena (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988) and political agenda as a problem worthy of attention (Anderson 2003; Entman 2007; Kingdon 1993/2004), issues must remain *active* in order to stimulate change (Wondemaghen, 2013: 3). This does appear to be the case to Eileen McCarron, *CC*, who theorised that the usual 'amnesia' — occurring when people begin to lose interest after mass shootings — has not occurred after Sandy Hook: "I don't know how long it will take or if it will ever settle in again."

11.3 Ways to Reframe the Issue

Since frames are an effective means of persuasion and attitude change (Aaroe 2011; Callaghan, 2005; Iyengar 1991; Gross 2008), GVP interest groups are currently devising reframing strategies. First, I will look at the approach rooted in the personal impact of gun violence: emphasising the emotional experiences of gun victims or, more controversially, showing graphic images of bullet wounds. After that, 'bullet control' is proposed as a frame which could possibly depoliticise the issue and regulate the harm-inducing bullets commonly used in school shootings. Lastly, the 'rights and responsibilities' frame of

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[94] These figures were accurate as of summer 2013.

combining the right to bear arms with a need to act responsibly by regulating about *who* can use them is discussed as a possible strategy to prevent another 'hegemonic struggle' (Fairclough 1995) over the second amendment.

11.3.1 The Personal Approach

The previous approach of using quoting gun death statistics —which, notably, has been described as representations of 'people with the tears dried off" (Gardner, 2008: 94) —now seems to be redundant. Ladd Everitt, *CSGV* explained using statistics alone does not work: "The thirty thousand gun deaths a year: it's a powerful statistic but just wasn't motivating people to believe in the issue." Such a claim contradicts Iyengar's (1991) findings that 'thematic frames' putting issues into context by measures such as statistics increases support for suggested schemes to resolve problems. This discrepancy might be explained by Gross (2008), whose research found that 'episodic framing' is more engaging, able to elicit emotional reactions of sympathy and pity, and, if the individual story is compelling enough, more persuasive. These insights were further extended by Aaroe (2011), who found that 'episodic framing' could be persuasive because of its emotional power. Thematic frames, by contrast, "do not provide specific characters at which receivers may direct their emotional reactions" (Aaroe, 2011: 210) and hence may struggle in trying to engage the audience. *Emotion* is the key factor here, for 'episodic frames' which do not provoke emotional reactions are likely to be *less* convincing than 'thematic frames': this is known as the 'non-emotional persuasiveness hypothesis' (Aaroe, 2011: 212).

An alternative approach being used by GVP interest groups, therefore, is to "lead to with a more emotional argument and then bring in the statistics to back it up."-Cathie Whittenburg, *SUPGV*. The *personal* aspect of gun violence is believed to be the theme likely to attract the most attention:

> "I think talking about the issue in terms of personal impact
> on families; the rights of people who don't want to own and
> carry guns in public, what *their* rights are in society, is
> powerful."-Ladd Everitt, *CSGV*

This follows the more emotional 'human interest' approach of representing the victims as real and identifiable persons in attempt to engage the audience (Aaroe, 2011: 159-160; Galtung and Ruge, 1965: 66-67; Gross, 2008: 172). The audience in this case becomes the 'mediated witness' who gets involved in the actual event through a process called 'defamilarization': what is 'ordinary' is reshaped into a personal experience (Peelo, 2006: 163-164). For instance, at the *MAIG* event (2013), a twenty year old girl gave a very emotional and impassioned speech about burying her sister, Vicky Soto, a teacher who died in the Sandy Hook shooting, and vowed she was now dedicated to changing gun laws:

> "I am determined to make sure that no one else has to feel the pain that I do. I am not giving up this fight against gun violence; no matter how long it takes and how hard I have to work, I am continuing to make this country a safer place."

Further background information finds that this young girl was infamously captured screaming into her mobile phone when she learned of her sister's death (see figure 16 below) in a picture encompassing the human suffering of school shootings. Moreover, her sister, Vicky, died protecting the children in her class and was hailed a heroine for her actions (see figure 17 on the next page) (Roberts 2012).

Figure 16: Carlee Soto learning of her sister's death[95]

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[95] This image was taken from the following news report: Roberts, C. (2012) 'Iconic photo of woman's anguish before learning her sister died in the Newtown massacre is a reminder that "kills," Carlee Soto says. *New York Daily News*, 18 December. *http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/photo-reaction-kills-sister-teacher-killed-newtown-article-1.1223033#ixzz2kMwhmEJs.*

Figure 17: Praise for Sandy Hook teacher, Vicky Soto.[96]

Notably, Aaroe (2011: 212) spoke about the 'persuasiveness hypothesis' where 'episodic frames' triggering emotion are more influential than 'thematic frames.' Peelo (2006: 169) also theorised that an emotional reaction to an event can result in 'mediated witnesses' taking action to ensure that something similar does *not* happen to them also. Therefore, it certainly seems that the content of the episodic frame around Vicky Soto would be compelling enough to generate a powerful emotional reaction; although there is a strong possibility that this intense response would only be short-term in nature (Gross, 2008: 1840).

Facilitating the 'personal approach' technique is the fact that a number of GVP groups have links to gun victims. So apparent is this connection that *CSGV's* Ladd Everitt summarised it in the following way: "We are victims of gun violence." On the *CSGV* staff is Lori Haas, whose daughter was seriously wounded during Virginia Tech. Similarly, *VACPS*'s president, Andrew Goddard, first got involved in the gun violence issue because his son, Colin, was shot (and survived) the Virginia Tech massacre; whilst Colin himself works for political action committee *MAIG*. Through their 'Advocacy through the Arts Campaign,' *VACPS* showcases the art work of gun violence victims, which is said to "really bring home to people 'look, this is what we just lost.'"-Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*.

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[96] This photograph was front page of *The Independence on Sunday* (2012) 'The Heroine of Sandy Hook,' 16 December (hard copy). A digital copy of the photograph was retrieved from: Weisenthal, Joe. (2012) 'The Independent's Incredible Front Page Honoring Victoria Soto "The Heroine of Sandy Hook,"' *Business Insider*, 15 December. *http://www.businessinsider.com/victoria-soto-hero-of-sandy-hook-2012-12#ixzz2xpBUBYBN.*

Eileen McCarron, *CC*, summarised the attraction of GVP groups to those impacted by gun violence: "We are a conduit for turning their grief to positive change." It appears then that the main motivation for joining GVP groups is to try to prevent further lives from being lost. This invariably means there is an emotional impact from working on this issue, even for those who do not have direct involvement with gun violence:

> "It's the thing about this issue that makes it the least enjoyable issue to work on: you're always dealing with people who have lost a husband or a daughter, or who were shot themselves or survived."-Jim Kessler, *TW*.

TW's Jim Kessler wears a 'Sandy Hook Promise' —an interest group formed after the shooting, mainly consisting of victims' parents and community members —wristband given to him by the father of a boy killed at Sandy Hook to remind him of the human toll of gun violence.

Another emotional technique of showing graphic images of gun violence victims to the public was suggested by Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*:

> "Show their guts on the floor; show blood pouring out; show them twitching and screaming. Gross people out…If it makes people sick, if it makes them throw up, they'll remember that."

The 'emotional arousal hypothesis,' predicated on the intention to evoke disgust, anger or pity, comes into play here (Aaroe 2011).One particularly evocative way to do this, *VACPS*'s Andrew Goddard suggested, would be to show the pictures of the children killed at Sandy Hook. This was also a suggestion made on Michael Moore's (2013) blog:

"When the American people see what bullets from an assault
rifle fired at close range do to a little child's body, that's the
day the jig will be up for the *NRA*."

Notably, the medical examiner conducting the Sandy Hook autopsies said it was "the worst
thing I have seen" (cited in Stableford 2012). Some of the parents of Sandy Hook victims
have lodged a petition for Connecticut to prevent the release of graphic images, stating
they do not want their children to be used to further gun regulation policies; currently, it
has almost eleven thousand signatures (Rudra 2013), so it is unlikely those images will
ever be released.

Given its distressing nature, there is little doubt this frame would have an impact upon
people in terms of noticing and remembering it (see Entman 1993). It is debatable,
however, whether this would actually *influence* audience thinking when it comes to guns.
Aaroe (2011: 220) claimed that emotional reactions increase support for policy positions.
What must be noted, however, is that frames are sometimes 'read' in a way that opposes
the dominant meaning (Entman1993: 56). In this case, therefore, it may reinforce beliefs
that other factors, like a lack of school security or poor mental health treatment, are the
main cause of school shootings. For instance, Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2001) found that
partisan ideologies motivate different interpretations of what causes school shooting:
Democrats tend to accuse gun accessibility; whilst Republicans often attribute blame to
violence in the media. So, the use of evocative imagery in the form of graphic pictures of
the Sandy Hook victims could just reinforce people's pre-existing beliefs (Callaghan,
2005: 189). To expand on this, to someone who already believes that increasing the
number of public places where guns can be carried improves safety could then possibly
infer that the solution to preventing another event like Sandy Hook is allowing teachers to
carry guns in schools (more will be said on this in the conclusion).

11.3.2 Bullet Control

Another way to reframe this issue is 'bullet control,' something which has not really been
deliberated in public discourse. Following a mass shooting in the UK, there was a proposal
made by scholar Squires (2010) that ammunition should not be stored alongside firearms in

the home. This is an interesting idea and could certainly be implemented in the UK; however, in the U.S., this would not be a viable option, given *Heller*'s ruling in favour of self-defence in the home. In the case of the U.S., 'bullet control' would take the form of conducting background checks for buying ammunition. The selling point is if someone owned a gun and became ineligible after committing a felony, this would prevent them from buying ammunition for that gun. Ammunition regulation was a part of the 'Gun Control Act' (1968) prohibiting mail order sales and requiring a log of ammunition sales (Henderson and Trotta 2013). This ended, however, in 1986 due to the 'Firearm Owners' Protection Act' diluting elements of the 1968 law (*Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence* 2012; Vizzard, 1999: 134). It may be the case that the regulation of ammunition may be easier than controlling guns, as "bullets last only one shot and the trail between purchaser and shooter is generally a short one, making it easier to follow" (Henderson and Trotta 2013).

California has just implemented a law mandating: the marking of bullets, background checks for purchases, and recording buyer information (Henderson and Trotta 2013). The justification for this bill was, at that point in time, "there is no way to track who is buying and this blind eye approach is putting ammunition in the hands of killers" (cited Jones and Quick 2013). Notably, my interviewees indicated that California was the progressive 'model' for gun regulations to aspire to, as this state is able to take further steps than the rest of the nation: "California can get into ammunition control because they already have a basis of stronger gun laws to build on."-Cathie Whittenburg, *SUPGV*; "They're [California] tackling issues and kind of laying the groundwork for issues that may eventually come up to the federal level."-Representative from a leading GVP group. As a whole, California, District of Columbia, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York require licenses to purchase or possess ammunition (Henderson and Trotta 2013; Jones and Quick 2013; *Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence* 2012).

Since ideology has been defined as an interest-linked perspective, there exists a 'struggle for legitimacy' (i.e. confirmation of that particular ideological perspective) predicated on existing divisions within society (Philo, 2007: 178). Something like 'bullet control,' therefore, could possibly depoliticise the issue away from the 'individual rights' and 'state rights' paradigms. *CSGV*'s Ladd Everitt, however, was sceptical about this being a way to circumvent the politics of gun regulation:

> "This notion that it's been hard to regulate guns but you
> might be able to regulate ammo [ammunition] is just not
> realistic — the *NRA* would fight that just as much as they
> fight guns [regulations], [as] both put dollars in their
> pocket."

A similar point was made by *BSG*'s Pete Brodnitz that the *NRA* is opposed to a ballistics registry to trace bullets used in crimes: this comes down to concerns about government surveillance. A way to resolve this could be to have such data held in private ownership rather than by the government (Cornell, 2006: 217).

There were also suggestions about regulating the types and number of bullets being sold. Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*, advocated regulating the quantities of bullets able to be sold. This seems particularly applicable to school shootings since the Virginia Tech shooter carried almost four hundred bullets with him (*Virginia Tech Review Panel*, 2007/2009: 74); whilst the Columbine perpetrators fired almost two hundred rounds and wore utility belts containing clips of 9mm bullets (*Jefferson County* n.d.). *TW*'s Jim Kessler, however, advised against taxing bullets to achieve this goal:

> "Criminals who are getting guns, they're only using a few
> bullets to shoot somebody; the person using fifty is at a
> shooting range. Of course, you've got these mass shootings,
> but I don't think they're gonna be deterred by some tax on
> bullets or that sort of thing."

An alternative strategy is perhaps New York's recent law requiring logs of purchases, so the police can be informed if someone is stockpiling bullets (Henderson and Trotta 2013).

Another recommendation was restricting bullets that increase the severity of wounds: "Special bullets designed to cause maximum harm should not be sold. So, [that's] cop killer bullets, incendiary bullets, hollow points…"-Andrew Goddard, *VACPS*. Currently, only eight states regulate such bullets (*Law Center to Prevent gun Violence* 2012). It seems that a post Sandy Hook environment might be an auspicious moment for setting the agenda of certain types of bullets as a problem requiring legislative action (Entman, 2007: 164).

Legal scholar Volokh (2009: 1489) claimed that limiting certain bullets, such as .50 calibre ones, would be constitutional because it would not affect self-defence.

Moreover, there seems to be a link between harm-inducing bullets and school shootings. The Virginia Tech shooter used 9mm 'hollow point bullets,' which penetrate further parts of the body rather than exiting it and are designed to inflict higher levels of damage than ordinary bullets (Green and Copper 2012). Similarly, the Sandy Hook shooter used bullets the same size as those used by military troops designed to tear bone and tissue apart (Rawlings 2012). Given that school shooters tend to be enraged and seeking 'revenge' on their peers (see Larkin 2009), harm-inducing bullets are something which may hold appeal for them. Tighter regulations of these could likely serve to reduce the severity of injuries in a school shooting situation; defining it as a problem (Entman 1993) would, therefore, need to be framed in terms of medical costs, in line with the Green and Cooper (2012) report on the financial implications of school shootings.

11.3.3 Rights and Responsibilities Message

BSG's Pete Brodnitz made the point that negativity towards gun regulation can be mitigated by involving gun owners in GVP advocacy groups: "A lot of [GVP] advocates don't own guns so they come from a completely different perspective and it's harder for the gun owners to trust them." When working with the interest group *Americans for Gun Safety* (which has now merged into the think tank *Third Way*), *BSG*'s Pete Brodnitz noticed they were initially glossing over the second amendment because, at that point, the Supreme Court had not set any parameters. Through polling experience, Pete Brodnitz, *BSG*, had discovered that the public believed there was a right to bear arms and so recommended that *AGS acknowledge* aspects of the 'individual rights' interpretation of the second amendment instead of debating about its meaning. Since ideology has been described as a "representation of events or facts which consistently favours the perceptual framework of one group" (*Glasgow Media Group*, 1980: 121-122), pertinent here was the 'naturalisation' (see Fairclough 1989, 1995a) of the ideological dimensions of the 'individual rights paradigm,' denoting there is a right to bear arms. When ideologies become 'naturalised,' it secures public 'consent' (see Lukes 1977/2005) by becoming incontestable, i.e. part of 'common sense' understandings (Shore and Wright, 1990: 24). So, to ignore such a 'common sense' ideology — to 'denaturalise' it in a sense

(Fairclough, 1995a: 94) — would likely result in a 'hegemonic struggle' (Fairclough 1989) or 'struggle for legitimacy' (Philo 2007) for the 'individual rights paradigm' to dominate. In the end, explained Pete Brodnitz, *BSG*, the message promoted by *AGS* was one of a right to bear arms and a responsibility to ensure that criminals and the mentally ill do not obtain guns.

The dual 'rights and responsibilities' message is currently being adopted by other GVP interest groups: "We went through a massive reframing campaign: we're not afraid to talk about the constitution, the second amendment, or rights or freedom."- Ladd Everitt, *CSGV*. Notably, Berger and Luckman (1967: 142) made the point that once ideologies are taken on by an interest group, a process of modification takes place and they are reshaped to fit with particular issues of concern. The *MAIG* event also had gun owners speaking in support of background checks. One of these was a survivor from the 2011 mass shooting in Tuscon, Arizona: "I'm a gun owner, a Republican, and I strongly support background checks. This isn't a Republican or a Democrat issue." This is not denaturalising ideologies but *reshaping* them to incorporate the 'individual rights' paradigm.

Conclusion

This chapter endeavoured to set the contextual framework within which future gun regulation will be situated. The legal and constitutional parameters of the *Heller* and *McDonald* Supreme Court rulings provide the parameters for gun regulation and eradicated the possibility of a blanket gun ban. Public-related sentiment about the term 'gun control' and the shift in importance following Sandy Hook offers an insight into the possibility of 'policy demand' (Anderson 2003) for gun regulatory measures. Findings were retrieved from, interviews with gun-related research participants; presentations given at the *MAIG* event on Capitol Hill; comments on *YouTube* and *White House* petitions with regards to gun reform and gun bans.

Building upon legal studies in this area, it was shown that the *Heller* (2008) and *McDonald* (2010) rulings established, to some extent, constitutional parameters on the issue of gun policy. The Washington, D.C. handgun ban was lifted following *Heller* with the view that there was a constitutional right to have guns in the home for protection;

hence, entrenching self-defence into interpretations of the second amendment, which *McDonald* then cemented into state laws. At the same time, *Heller* and *McDonald* buttressed the notion there should be limitations on what the second amendment allows, in terms of *who* is allowed to own guns and *where* they can be carried.

Perhaps the most salient point to be taken from *Heller* is that the 'slippery slope' argument that gun regulations will lead to a UK-style gun ban on private gun ownership in the U.S. has been rendered obsolete. A notable finding was that the Supreme Court decision is generally overlooked in debates about gun policy. My interviewees positioned the gun lobby into the role of 'fear mongers' (Glassner 2004), who still utilise the 'slippery slope' argument to invoke fear and hence mobilise movements against gun regulations. The most extreme 'slippery slope' argument, evident in some *YouTube* debates, is that the government staged mass shootings with the intention to enforce a gun ban and purporting the U.S. will end up tyrannical like Nazi Germany. This type of sentiment puts one in mind of Hofstader's (1963) 'paranoid style of politics' thesis, which is predicated on feelings of persecution and paranoia.

Consequently, a post-*Heller* and *McDonald* context means that the principle of self-defence will always be taken into account when formulating gun regulation. At the same time, the limitations enforced by the rulings that the dangerously mentally ill and criminals cannot own guns and firearms should not be carried by citizens in 'sensitive' places like schools and government building also prescribes the viability of gun laws, such as restricting concealed carry in certain places and groups on the prohibited buyers list.

The term 'gun control' as a persuasive linguistic tool (Semino 2008; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012) was found to be a failure. The main reason for this is its meaning is commonly misconstrued as being in conflict with American ideals of 'rights' and 'freedom' (Lasswell *et al.* 1949). The conflation of guns with culture (Kohn 2004; Squires 2000) and national identity (Anderson 1991; Calhoun 1997; Edensor 2002) was also found to come into play here. The alternative term of 'gun violence prevention' are commonly being appropriated by GVP interest groups.

Citizens are pertinent to the policy-making process (Burns and Crawford 1999; Kingdon 1994/2003; Spitzer 2004). It appeared that before the Sandy Hook shooting gun violence was not an issue of public concern, with even mass shootings becoming 'normalised' to a certain extent. Sandy Hook acted as a 'focusing event' (Birkland 1997; Kingdon 1994/2003) allowing for the political, policy and problem streams to combine

(Kingdon 1993/2004) and for 'gun violence' to appear in the social arena (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988) and political agenda (Anderson 2003; Entman 2007; Kingdon 1993/2004).

Reframing strategies suggested by gun-related interviewees were then interrogated for their ability to make gun violence an issue of public concern. A number of GVP groups are adopting the 'personal' approach, which follows the human interest dimension of gun violence: the emotional impact of losing someone; the involvement of gun violence victims or relatives in interest groups. Framing it in an 'episodic' way by looking at individual stories and experiences has the potential to have persuasiveness (Gross 2008; Aaroe 2011). Another technique suggested but not yet being used was showing graphic images of gunshot wounds. Drawing attention to the visceral and horrifying nature of school shootings would certainly give the issue salience (Entman 1993, 2007) and elicit emotional responses (Aaroe 2011); yet it could just reinforce existing beliefs (Callaghan 2005), such as attributing school shootings to other factors or believing that teachers should be armed in schools. There is no evidence that making the issue of gun violence more salient would necessarily translate into support for gun regulation.

An alternative frame not discussed much in public discourse is 'bullet control.' Several states, like California and New York, are already taking steps to regulate who can purchase ammunition and tracking stockpiling of ammunition: it seems like something that could be particularly relevant to school shootings, given the Columbine and Virginia Tech perpetrators fired hundreds of rounds of bullets. It is possible that framing the issue as 'bullet control' would remove the need for ideological 'struggles for legitimacy' (Philo 2007) when it comes to guns. Most interviewees seemed doubtful, however, about whether this frame would actually be viable in other states or at the federal level. Another aspect of this issue is harm-inducing bullets: hollow point bullets were used in the Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook school shootings. Given the medical costs associated with harm-inducing bullets, this could be a possible frame to pursue in future.

Another frame being embraced by GVP groups is the dual 'rights and responsibilities' message, acknowledging the Supreme Court rulings of the right to bear arms but combining this with a level of responsibility to ensure public safety is not infringed. To ignore the 'individual rights paradigm' completely —and hence attempt to denaturalise it —would likely result in a 'hegemonic struggle' (Fairclough 1989) over interpretations of the second amendment. Working alongside gun owners is a way to gain support, as evidenced at the *MAIG* event: a GVP group operating without the support of gun owners is likely to be regarded with more trepidation as being completely against guns. This

demonstrates the reshaping of ideologies in order to fit with competing interests (Berger and Luckman 1967).

The purpose of this chapter was to get behind the intricacies of gun policy-making in the U.S.: the political and legal arena set by *Heller* and *McDonald*, as well as public sentiment and support. The next and final chapter 'Conclusion' will conclude all elements of the thesis and make reference to potential future developments, such as suggestions to arm teachers.

Chapter 12: Conclusion to the Thesis

Introduction

The overall aim of this thesis was to map and explore the cultures of fear generated by two US school shootings, Columbine High School in 1999 and Virginia Tech in 2007, and use these as case studies through which to examine the policy implications of managing school shootings in an educational context and the broader gun-related movements pertaining to attempts to prevent and negate the threat of school shootings. The use of two case studies of 'spectacular shootings' and the exclusive focus on the U.S. means it represents a very small portion of incidents, nevertheless the analysis provides important insights. The linkages between fear and school shootings are something which has been addressed to some extent by scholars like Altheide (2009), Burns and Crawford (1999) and Killingbeck (2001), however, the original approach of this thesis is to examine the impact of the culture of fear years after the shooting. Examining *YouTube* comments showed the way school shootings are interpreted and strategies devised to deal with potential victimhood — and by so doing shows the entrenchment of fear in understandings of the phenomenon.

This final chapter draws together the research findings, summarises the arguments developed throughout the thesis and describes the implications of this research. It also presents some ideas for developing further research in this area.

A key explanatory concept used in this research has been that of 'moral panic' and in particular the 'cultivation' and 'operation' stages of a moral panic, when discourses start shaping the foundations for it to develop and the issue is amplified and concern is expressed by the public (Klocke and Muschert 2010). This was particularly important in terms of analysing the news media portrayal of the two school shooting case studies and public reactions as documented in contemporary *YouTube* comments for: charting the conduct of subsequent policy deliberations; understanding the challenges of delivering responses within the context of heightened public anxieties and divided views.

In order to more fully explore the policy and practice responses to two such horrific events, the thesis examined the emergency management policies, and communication policies adopted by law enforcement and educational authorities in

the aftermath of the events. The Columbine case study revealed strong criticism of the law enforcement response, as evidenced by letters to editors of newspapers and in You Tube comments; yet this was more obscured in news media content. The thesis showed the ways in which the 'blame' attached to law enforcement precipitated — changes in police training and responses to school shooting situations.

The case study of Virginia Tech was used as a lens through which to examine the changes made to emergency communication in educational institutions. Evident in news media content and letters to the editor were strong criticisms of *Virginia Tech University* on the basis *of* the delay in issuing emergency alerts on the day of the shooting, which also led to the filing of a lawsuit. It is argued that this led to *Virginia Tech University* expediting its plans to upgrade emergency communication and encouraged other institutions to do the same. Furthermore, it also created a market for a smartphone app, which maps out violent and criminal incidents occurring at higher education institutions and offers provisions to aid communication during and following a crisis like a school shooting.

The thesis also engages closely with the gun-related policy implications of school shootings. A key development, which is explored in some detail, is the 'concealed carry on campus' movement, which gained traction after the Virginia Tech shooting. The research revealed that this movement is predicated on a self-defence argument, entrenched in fear about the possibility of another school shooting occurring, and a deep lack of trust in law enforcement. The possibility of gun reform is placed into context by considering the current political and legal terrain set up by Supreme Court rulings, and the challenges of persuading the US public that gun violence is a pressing social issue. Given that the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings occurred fifteen and seven years ago respectively, some possible future developments in gun legislation are presented.

In what follows, the key themes of the thesis are: the ways in which media and public responses to school shootings shape public anxieties and focus on the issue of accountability and, in particular, the attribution of blame, and; the policy legacy of school shootings pertaining to emergency management, communication and guns are presented and conclusions are drawn. Thereafter, I provide some projections for a post Sandy Hook future, and outline potential avenues to pursue in future research projects.

12.1 News Media and Public Responses to School Shootings

This research shows that the news media constructions and public responses (in the form of letters to the editor and *YouTube* comments) to school shootings centre around: the normalisation of this phenomenon, which translates into fear about a future attack and holding certain actors accountable for not dealing with the school shooting adequately. As will be explicated in the next sub-section, this affects subsequent policy developments in relation to this particular type of violence.

An examination of news content found that: Columbine and Virginia Tech were immortalised as infamous school shooting incidents and constant references were made to the death toll; the term Columbine has been incorporated into the lexicon of multiple-victim murders and youth violence; terminology circumscribed school shootings as an frequent and continuing events. The portrayal of school shootings in this way led to the 'normalisation' of school shootings, where it appeared as a naturalised occurrence with the potential to happen anywhere. 'Normalisation' of a phenomenon is a key element of the culture of fear (Glassner 2004); as well as the final stage of a moral panic, cementing its 'symbolic legacy' which can henceforth re-emerge in future ones (Klocke and Muschert 2010).

The research revealed that the 'sound' or audio element in news media content is crucial to bringing the scenes to life and is important for the creation and development of a moral panic. This is an original insight which this research contributes. In addition, the research discovered that, within news discourses, there was the existence of 'counteractive culture of fear' themes, as it were. These can be found primarily in the form of occasional quotes from 'experts' and statistical evidence about the infrequent or sporadic nature of such incidents. The juxtaposition of these comments and materials with more sensationalised content normalising school and other mass shootings means the presence of realistic interpretations of school shootings seems only rudimentary in nature. As mentioned in the discussion about the 'emotional approach' to framing gun violence in chapter eleven, statistics alone are unlikely to gain people's attention; rather they need to be coupled with an emotional dimension. In the case of the culture of fear, the emotional aspects of fear, anxiety and terror (see, for instance, Furedi, 1997; Jackson 2004, 2009; Jackson and Gray 2010; Warr 2000) are likely to overwhelm the pragmatic approach of citing statistics and using experts' quotations.

With it having been established that there was a culture of fear, the second part of the analysis was to decipher public reactions to it as a 'social phenomenon' (Elias 1982; Furedi 2007). It was found that the 'normalisation' of school shootings makes the risk appear commonplace, as though it *will* occur at some point. A key stage in the development of fear is when those considered most at risk accept their potential victimhood (Furedi 1997; Jackson 2004). Letters written after Columbine and present day *YouTube* debates indicate that schoolchildren and university students are embracing the 'symbolic victim' (Altheide 2002; Garland 2001) stance, where being 'at risk' becomes a part of their identity (Furedi 1997, 2008; Gardner 2008; Wahlberg and Sjoberg 2000). This potential victimhood re-emerged in chapter nine's discussion of concealed carry on campus, where fear of future attacks translates into that solution for some *YouTube* users. Moreover, this fear has also created a gap in the market for smartphone apps like *LiveSafe*.

In particular, it does seem that Columbine entrenched feelings of fear and worry to an elevated level, even fourteen years later as documented in *YouTube* comments. The visceral nature of videos (mainly documentaries and footage from the shooting) encourages *YouTube* users to emphasise with the victims and survivors, as they imagine themselves in that situation and how terrifying it would be. Similar to the portrayal of sound in news media content, recorded noises seemed to exacerbate feelings of fear for users. The *YouTube* video containing a mobile phone recording of Norris Hall building being stormed by police during the Virginia Tech shooting provoked a particularly distressed reaction from *YouTube* users. It, therefore, seems likely Mythen's (2010) thesis that mobile technologies facilitate the promotion of 'risk events' is likely to become even more apparent in future, as the 'convergence culture' (Jenkins 2006) of new and traditional media forms creates more opportunities for 'citizen journalism' (Gillmor 2007) to capture incidents as they transpire.

When it comes to the public experiencing fear, I have theorised that the schemata (Entman 1993) surrounding the 'threat' is stored away between school shooting events and re-emerges after the most recent attack. Salience of news coverage is, therefore, pertinent to the presence of fear (Sunstein 2005; Wahlberg and Sjoberg 2000). My argument here adheres to Sunstein (2005) and Wahlberg and Sjoberg's (2000) ideas that the salience of news media coverage about the 'risk event' is pivotal to the creation of fear.

Another way to deal with school shootings, highlighted by the research, is to hold certain parties accountable for failing to foresee the incident or deal with it adequately when it occurs. As discussed in the thesis, attributions of blame were assigned to official actors: law enforcement officials for Columbine; and education officials for Virginia Tech. Within the Columbine news media sample, perhaps surprisingly, there was little in the way of direct criticism of law enforcement. By contrast, in letters to the editor and *YouTube* discourses, public reactions were very critical of the law enforcement response, with the main accusation being the delayed reaction led to the death of teacher, Dave Sanders, who lost too much blood to survive. This criticism was pertinent to the emergency management policy responses; as well as the support for concealed carry on campus due to the feeling that law enforcement inadequately protects citizens.

In the case of the delay in emergency communication during the Virginia Tech shooting, there was strong criticism of *Virginia Tech University* officials within news media content and letters to the editor — although not in *YouTube* content, where the issue was not raised at all. As mentioned earlier, reputation is a valuable asset for institutions and keeping it intact has increasingly become the focal point of 'secondary risk management' (Coombs 2012; Power 2004). This became evident in *Virginia Tech University*'s attempt to 'repair their image' by using the 'defeasibility' technique (see Beniot 1997), claiming a lack of information had caused the delay. As discussed in chapter eight, the subsequent lawsuit against the university was a catalyst for: redefining 'timely warning' in federal laws; emergency communication improvements both at *Virginia Tech University* and other higher education institutions throughout the nation.

12.2 The Policy Legacy of School Shootings

The news media constructions and public reactions discussed above set the context for policy responses to school shootings as they pertain to emergency management, emergency communication and, to a lesser extent, concealed carry on campus. Agents of social control and action groups 'managed' the moral panic arising from both shootings into particular directions against the 'new threats' and this led to the 'institutionalisation' of new laws (Altheide 1009; Garland 2008). These findings

support Garland's (2008: 15) claim that moral panic episodes "create effects and leave a legacy."

Flaws in emergency management planning, training and response exposed by the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings created a demand for change; they, henceforth, were converted into policy responses at the local, state and federal levels. The institutions where the attacks occurred addressed the weaknesses in their plans. In the states of Colorado and Virginia where these shootings occurred, the requirement to have an emergency management plan in place was written into law. Nation-wide, other institutions began to make changes to their emergency management planning to account for a school shooting scenario. Additionally, federal funding was provided for six hundred school resource officer positions; whilst SROs also became more involved in devising emergency management plans. This brings to mind Furedi's (2008) claim about the protection of the 'vulnerable' (in this case, children) in risk management. Pertinent in risk management is whether the cost of the prevention mechanism outweighs the cost of the risk should it transpire (Coombs 2012). Clearly, in the case of school shootings, the potential loss of human life, as well as damages to property and institutional reputation (see Coombs 2012; Power 2004 for further explanations of the asset value of reputation), means that plans must consider the best options to reducing risk. It is likely that another high profile school shooting would encourage educational institutions to revisit their emergency management plans once more.

In relation to training, the criticism directed at the law enforcement response to Columbine meant that it became mandatory in Colorado that first responders had to train together to respond more effectively to emergencies. It also created a market for the 'standard response protocol,' developed by the *I Love U Guys* foundation, which has been used to train educators and students throughout Colorado. Since *I Love U Guys* has plans to expand this protocol across the U.S., it is likely to shape emergency management training in future. Something not currently in place but which could impact future training is the fact that educators also tend to be actual first responders to school shootings, especially if they occur in the classroom; henceforth, there could be moves in future to include teachers and administrators in first responder training. Additionally, if more schools decide to allow teachers to carry firearms to respond to threats (to be discussed later in the conclusion), the need for joint training will become even more apparent.

On another topic, since there was not much in the way of criticism of the law enforcement response to Virginia Tech, the only real emergency management change to come from it was that *Virginia Tech University* began to include 'active shooter' scenarios

in joint training exercises between campus law enforcement and local police; funds were also appropriated for new positions and equipment for campus police. This indicates an increasing normalisation of 'military' procedures in law enforcement (Kraska and Kappeler 1997; Kraska 2007). I have also suggested that Jonescu's (2013; in press) 'tactical architecture' hypothesis could be utilised to possibly improve future training procedures, where police agencies involved in responding to crises could study the design of the campus to aid them in designing response strategies.

Returning to the criticism of law enforcement at Columbine, this meant that law enforcement tactics changed its rescue priorities, placing the life of the suspect at the bottom and hostages/civilians at the top. Switching to values and tactics similar to that of the military once again shows an increasing 'militarisation' of policing (Kraska 2007). Despite this, the sentiment that 'law enforcement are just there to clean up the crime scene' (i.e. they will fail to be there to protect citizens) still circulates and motivates alternative proposals to deal with school shootings, such as concealed carry on campus and the arming of teachers.

The second factor of communication during crises is something relating to the Virginia Tech shooting only. The research found that *Virginia Tech University* tried to mend the reputational damage through public relations strategies; but, ultimately, the criticism from the news media and letters to the editor was really strong. The subsequent lawsuit filed against the university led to a 'transformation' (Klocke and Muschert 2010) in the emergency communication policies of *Virginia Tech University* itself and higher education institutions throughout the nation. It also meant that 'timely warning' was defined in the 2007 revision to the federal 'Clery Act' (1991).

The criticism directed at the university also meant a gap was created in the market for emergency communication smartphone apps, like *LiveSafe*. The *LiveSafe* app has a function mapping out all the violent and criminal incidents occurring at higher education institutions. The *LiveSafe* map function could help to create the 'transparent risk management system' advocated by Power (2004) to prevent institutional dishonesty. The app also offers provisions to aid communication during and following a crisis like a school shooting, giving the option to text emergency services and to 'check in' with personal contacts. This has the potential to create 'functional fear' (Jackson and Gray 2010), by allowing people feeling concerned about crime to use the app as a form of precautionary action. Overall, it seems likely that mobile phone technologies will advance in future and

become further linked with emergency communication, especially as institutions attempt to deal with possibility of crises like school shootings — this is something which could be the focus of future research.

The final policy legacy of concealed carry on campus gained traction after the Virginia Tech shooting and is now allowed in five US states. That said, the public fear generated by the Columbine shooting is likely to have had a role in exacerbating the 'potential victimhood' of students, particularly if they had been in school at the time of Columbine and then at university during Virginia Tech. Since previous scholarly studies have tended to focus only on the legality of concealed carry bans, especially in a post *Heller*-environment, it was felt that focusing on this movement's relation to notions of fear and vulnerability was an important part of the debate.

One of the driving factors of 'potential victimhood' seemed to be sentiments expressed on *YouTube* about law enforcement, such as: 'When seconds count, police are only minutes away' and 'The police are just there to clean up the crime scene,' i.e. they will arrive too late to save individuals and only respond to the aftermath. Interviewee, John McDonald, surmised that this has its origins in the criticism of the SWAT response to the Columbine shooting (detailed in chapter seven), and subsequent mass shootings showing that deaths do occur before the police arrive to intervene. His argument seems credible, considering a high number of *YouTube* commentators who referenced Columbine as an instance when the police failed to adequately protect people. This lack of trust, confidence and legitimacy in law enforcement (see Farrall *et al.* 2009; Tyler 2011) sets the foundations for the 'self-defence' argument.

This research found a combination of three elements positing concealed carry as the 'solution' to the problem (Altheide 1997) of school shootings:

- 'gun free zones' like college and university campuses are believed to face threats from school shooters and other criminals;
- inhabitants on campus will be unable to defend themselves should a threat transpire because of bans on carrying firearms;
- law enforcement will not arrive in time to save people and there will be deaths.

To some extent, this explains the unanticipated research finding that some *YouTube* users are defying campus bans by carrying firearms with them anyway to prevent potential victimisation (see, Gabriel and Greve 2003; Scherer *et al.* 2004) from school shootings and more general campus crime.

12.3 Projections for a Post Sandy Hook Future

In this section, I use the research findings to speculate about future developments in relation to gun laws. In the first stage of interviews with gun violence prevention groups carried out in autumn 2012, the general feeling was that action on gun reform had stagnated and that gun violence was not a key issue of concern for the public. This changed with the 'focusing event' (Birkland 1997; Kingdon 1994/2003) of the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting in December 2012, resulting in 'gun violence' appearing in the social arena (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988) and political agenda (Anderson 2003; Entman 2007; Kingdon 1993/2004) as a social problem. The cementing of school and mass shootings as a social problem allowed for political actors to 'manage' the moral panics by shaping 'remedies' to the problem (Entman 1993). These means that gun laws are the current salient issues; more so than emergency management ones, although potential developments for them were noted in the previous sub-section. I will firstly discuss the concealed carry on campus and arming teachers movements currently under discussion; whilst the proposals made by the gun-related interviewees are critiqued for their potential to come to fruition in future.

Within *YouTube* comments and as evidenced by the interview material, there was clear divisiveness about concealed carry on campus. Some *YouTube* users and the GVP group interviewees felt there were too many safety concerns with allowing students to carry firearms on campus and also challenged the self-defence argument of concealed carry permit holders stopping a school shooting situation, with one interviewee describing it as the highly idealistic 'Bruce Willis argument.' By contrast, other *YouTube* users referred to a right to self-defence to argue in favour of it and referenced the *Heller* and *McDonald* rulings to describe gun bans at higher education institutions as 'unconstitutional.' From all that has been discussed, it certainly seems some *YouTube* users are set in their beliefs about self-defence and

the ability of concealed carry permit holders to neutralise school shooters. Projecting into the future, if further school shootings were to occur — especially highly publicised ones in a similar vein to Virginia Tech — it is likely that these feelings could be further exemplified and bring about more support for this movement.

This has been evinced, to some extent, after Sandy Hook, which has shifted focus to the 'arming teachers debate' concerning whether teachers should carry concealed weapons in elementary, middle and high schools to protect against school shooters. Oklahoma Representative, Mark McCullough, framed arming teachers as the most viable solution to threats: "It is incredibly irresponsible to leave our schools undefended — to allow mad men to kill dozens of innocents when we have a very simple solution available to us to prevent it" (cited in Simon 2012). This movement resulted in legislative proposals to arm teachers in twelve US states (Welch 2013); whilst Harrold, a remote town in Texas, is now allowing trained teachers to carry weapons to school (Brown 2012). It is possible there could be a shift towards the thinking that it is acceptable and positive for some trusted staff members to be able to carry weapons at schools in case anything untoward were to happen.

In contrast, at the 'School Safety Symposium,' there was some tentative discussion in this area by Paul Taylor (Insurance Attorney, *Texas Association of School Boards Risk Management Fund*) about possible problems with arming teachers. One potential problem concerns the risk that it would pose problems for general liability insurance due to the possibility of accidental discharge and students stealing weapons for criminal use. He also maintained that the parameters for self-defence need to be clarified for armed teachers: should teachers use guns to break up fights between students; would this also apply off school grounds, such as field trips, sports games at neighbouring schools; would the teacher be held liable if they *failed* to act in a situation and someone was wounded or killed. These are all issues likely to resurface in future.

Also looking to the future, the *Heller* (2008) and *McDonald* (2010) rulings are important to debates about both movements. Concealed carry on campus probably has a higher chance of appealing current bans: those promoting the issue will likely challenge on the grounds of student housing, which falls under the rubric of the *Heller* ruling of self-defence in the home. In contrast to this, the fact that the rulings explicated limitations on concealed carry should remain in places 'sensitive places' like educational institutions could counteract any attempts to overturn existing bans in higher education institutions and particularly schools where minors are present. In order to clearly set parameters on what is

acceptable, it is likely that the definitions of 'home' and 'sensitive places' will have to be explicated further in future rulings.

The second stage of interviews conducted in summer and autumn 2013 showed a marked change in the political landscape, with the emergence of more funding, public and political support for the issue, as well as the formation of new gun violence prevention groups. Interviewees all seemed optimistic about the future of gun reform and believed change would be slow but significant. Furthermore, the legality of the *Heller* (2008) and *McDonald* (2010) rulings has set parameters on what is possible for future gun regulatory measures. The notion of self-defence in the home will always need to be taken into account when devising legislation. What must also be considered are the limitations buttressed by the rulings that certain groups (the dangerously mentally ill and criminals) are forbidden from owning guns and concealed carry should be prohibited in 'sensitive places' like government buildings and schools.

Given the current political and public landscape, it seems background checks are the proposed measure with the highest chance of success; despite it not having any clear link to the Sandy Hook shooting. This measure has the most public support documented in the results of polls; it is a relatively 'uncontroversial' regulatory measure that politicians and gun owners are also more likely to endorse than other proposals. The gun violence prevention groups who participated in the research and the *MAIG* political action committee are all coalescing on the issue of background checks.

Interviewees believed that a way to create 'policy demand' (Anderson 2003) for restricted magazine capacities would be to emphasise examples where the shooter pausing to reload is allowed bystanders to restrain and disarm them as transpired in the Tuscon, Arizona (2011) mass shooting. It seems unlikely that this would convince non-supporters, however as those incidences may be too rare and atypical to actually be persuasive or it may just reinforce existing frames (Callaghan 2005; Entman 1993), such as expanding concealed carry so that armed citizens can fire at the shooter. Explicating this argument is the recent counter-initiative in Colorado against the recently implemented law limiting magazine clips to fifteen rounds. This suggests the issue of assault weapons and large capacity magazines are too divisive to ever gain policy traction in future at the federal-level; it may instead fall to individual states based on levels of public support and its existing baseline of gun regulation.

In order to gain support for the gun laws being proposed, interviewees discussed current reframing strategies of values being utilised (Edelman 1964) to successfully make gun violence an issue of public concern. A commonly appropriated technique is the 'personal' approach examining the human interest aspect of gun violence. Of all of the techniques discussed this has the potential to be persuasive, given it is an 'episodic' frame (Gross 2008; Aaroe 2011) looking at the experiences of gun violence survivors and those who have lost people in this way. Another human interest technique suggested by one interviewee was drawing attention to the visceral and horrifying nature of school shootings by showing graphic images of gunshot wounds. Such a frame would certainly give it salience (Entman 1993, 2007) and elicit emotional responses (Aaroe 2011). There is no evidence, however, that this would be axiomatic with support for gun regulation; indeed it may instead just reinforce existing beliefs (Callaghan 2005) of alternative 'solutions' to the problem, such as improved mental health care or arming teachers in schools.

An alternative frame which I would advocate — and has not received much attention so far — is 'bullet control.' Interviewees were generally in favour of this idea but believed it would be a difficult issue to promote. An alternative suggestion was to focus on harm-inducing bullets which have been used in school shootings like Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook. Since there has been action on harm-inducing bullets in the past (such as 'cop killer' bullets; see Vizzard 1999 for further information), this might be a possible successful framing technique in future, particularly if the medical costs of treating gunshot wounds caused by such bullets are a key focus of the strategy.

Another frame commonly being utilised by gun violence prevention groups is the 'rights and responsibilities' message: this acknowledges the second amendment interpretation of the *Heller* (2008) ruling; whilst, highlighting the responsibility part of ensuring public safety. The *MAIG* event showed gun owners working alongside the political action committee to promote gun legislation on universal background checks. Forming coalitions between gun owners and gun violence prevention groups seems a fruitful approach to allow for policy avenues to be pursued, which have higher levels of support and thus a greater chance of being passed and written into laws.

12.4 Areas for Future Research

What was achievable within the parameters of this thesis was limited. The findings have raised some ideas about avenues for future research, relating to the linkages of school shootings with news media coverage, school security, and gun legislation.

Firstly, the news media analysis here concentrated solely on the language of stories, so future studies could usefully look at the imagery and positioning of stories in print newspapers. Future studies could ascertain the impact of the visual on the culture of fear by also analysing broadcast news. Newbold's (1998) technique of breaking down the visual and technical components of videos could be employed to examine the 'citizen journalism' footage recorded on devices like mobile phones and is subsequently used in news media stories. As noted in chapter six, *YouTube* videos containing real-life images of Columbine and Virginia Tech served to increase feelings of fear. Real-time recordings of school shootings will likely be to increase feelings of anxiety and fear[97], providing visual images of children crying and screaming, survivors covered in blood, and perhaps even the shooting itself.

The school security findings here could be built upon with the pursuit of a longitudinal study, such as questionnaires or focus groups with schoolchildren to look at their feelings about emergency management training; or a risk management study with professionals involved in designing plans and implementing training. Moreover, the creation of the *LiveSafe* app indicates a changing marketplace for conceptualising safety. The focus of future projects could be speaking to users of *LiveSafe* and similar smartphone apps to discover their effects on a sense of safety and negating fear, and usefulness for those that have used such apps for emergency communication purposes during a crisis.

When it comes to gun legislation and school shootings, the 'arming teachers' movement requires further exploration. Issues around liability insurance could be addressed by legal scholars. In this thesis, it did not seem relevant to speak to gun-rights groups because the focus was on gun reform efforts[98]. For arming teachers research, however, it would be particularly relevant to speak to gun-rights groups like the *National Rifle Association* which have championed the issue. The social impact of those schools which have enacted armed teachers policies or are considering doing so is also something which needs to be researched by speaking to parents, educators and students.

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[97] The recording of the 911 call made in the library at Columbine is an example of this: gunshots, screams from victims and the shooters yelling can be heard in the background. One can only imagine how distressing a video recording of a school shooting would be.

[98] The only exception to this is the gun-rights group I intended to speak to, *Students for Concealed Carry*, because of my focus in chapter nine on this particular movement. As it transpired, the group did not respond to my multiple requests for their participation in the study.

12.5 Epilogue

This thesis has aimed to contribute to a steadily growing field of literature on school shootings. The findings have been located within a social constructionist approach to framing, news media, policy-making; and studies relating to fear of crime, self-defence and risk management. Thematic threads throughout the entire thesis relate to fear, power, framing, the structural influence of news media, and reactions documented in *YouTube* discourses. More specifically, individual data analysis chapters drew upon specific bodies of literature pursuant to the subject matter, e.g. the chapter on communication during school shootings used crisis communication and reputational management scholars. This allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the findings and demonstrated how they could contribute to current literature. In summary, this thesis has offered an inter-disciplinary approach to researching the issue of school shootings. Future research should aim to develop this further engaging with the complexities of the phenomenon.

Tracking policy developments allowed an assessment of the 'productivity' of the moral panic in terms of emergency management planning, communication, and concealed carry on campus. Technological advances and the normalisation of school shootings suggest that smartphone apps in future might change the conceptualisation of emergency management and communication in future. The divided nature of gun laws means the response to the next school shooting will likely be conflicted: some will advocate arming teachers and students at higher education institutions; whilst others will want to strengthen existing laws and/or introduce further ones. The Sandy Hook shooting has meant that gun violence and school shootings are once again salient issues for the public — this strongly suggests that there will likely be some kind of policy response and news media/public reaction to future school shootings.

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'Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act,' H.R. 3355, Pub. L 103-322 (1994)

State Laws

California SB 53 (2013)

Colorado Revised Statute. C.R.S. 22-32-109.1 (2008, 2012)

Colorado HB 12-1228 (2013)

Colorado HB 13-1229 (2013)

Colorado HB 13-1224 (2013)

Virginia Code. VA. § 23-9.2:9. (Deeds 2008)

Appendix A: News Media Overview

Source	Type	Political Slant
Daily News (New York)	Daily Tabloid	Liberal
Denver Post	Daily Broadsheet	Centrist/liberal
New York Post	Daily Tabloid	Conservative
New York Times	Daily Broadsheet	Liberal
Newsweek	Newsweekly	Centrist/liberal
Richmond Times Dispatch	Daily Broadsheet	Conservative
Roanoke Times	Daily Broadsheet	Liberal
Rocky Mountain News	Daily Tabloid	Liberal
TIME	Newsweekly	Centrist/liberal
USA Today	Daily Tabloid	Centrist/liberal
Washington Post	Daily Broadsheet	Liberal

This table was compiled by reading sources like Groseclose and Milyo (2005) and Kupchik and Bracy (2009) and the website 'Left-Right.' www.left-right.us/about.html.

Appendix B: Overview of Interviewees

Interviewee	Location	Organisation	Type
Anonymous	Washington, D.C. (telephone only)	Anonymous	GVP Group
Anonymous	Washington, D.C.	*LiveSafe*	Emergency Communication
Andrew Goddard	Virginia	*Virginia Center for Public Safety*	GVP Group
Cathie Whittenburg	Maine (Skype/telephone only)	*States United to Prevent Gun Violence*	GVP Group
Eileen McCarron	Colorado	*Colorado Ceasefire*	GVP Group
John McDonald	Colorado (email only)	*Jefferson County Public Schools*	Emergency Management Director
Jim Kessler	Washington, D.C.	*Third Way*	Think tank
Ladd Everitt	Washington, D.C.	*Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence*	GVP Group
Pete Brodnitz	Washington, D.C.	*Benenson Strategy Group*	Political Pollster

Appendix C: Protocol for Policy Documents

Title of policy document:

Author(s) of policy document:

Date of policy document:

Edition (i.e. first or updated):

Source retrieved from:

Some background information about the aforementioned source:

Funding sources:

Relates to which school shooting:

Research conducted:

Rationale of research:

Area of change recommended (emergency management, changes to gun ownership, etc):

Course of action recommended:

Course of action declined:

Steps to be taken to implement aforementioned course of action:

Any possible problems foreseen with this:

Any monitoring of course of action once implemented:

Appendix D: Timeline of Emergency Management Planning and Communication Training Changes

2000

Colorado 'Safe Schools Act' amended: providing funds to schools mapping information to first responders.

2008

Establishment of the *School safety Resource Center* in Colorado: law provided funding and assistance to schools to prepare for emergencies.

Colorado 'Safe Schools Act' implemented: each school to adopt an emergency management plan, crisis management procedures and train employees.

Virginia 'Institutional crisis and emergency management plan review required' bill implemented: annual functional exercise required' bill implemented: all higher education institutions are to have emergency management plans to be reviewed and revised (if required) every year; carry out a drill; every four year, it should be sent to Virginia's *Department of Emergency Management.*

Virginia 'First Warning and Emergency Notification System' bill implemented: comprehensive, prompt and reliable notification systems; appointment of trained, authorised persons to activate them.

Amendment of the 'Clery Act' (1991): emergency alert to be released within half an hour; alert methods to be published, tested and reported; authority of law enforcement in relaying alerts to be defined.

Appendix E: Timeline of Gun Legislation Changes

2000

Colorado 'closed the gun show loophole' by voter initiative: this meant all sales at gun shows required background checks.

2008

Utah became the first state to allow 'concealed carry on campus': it became a model for proposed bills in other states.

Virginia closed the 'mental health loophole' by Executive Order: anyone who had been through a about court-ordered review was prohibited.

Supreme Court Ruling *District of Columbia et al. v. Dick Anthony Heller* (2008): overturned the Washington, D.C. handgun regulations; ruled there is a constitutional right to have guns in the home for self-defence; maintained that current restrictions on 'dangerous groups' and 'sensitive places' should still apply.

The federal 'NICS Improvement Amendments Act' (2008) was signed into law: authorising incentives for states, courts & tribes to provide information to NICS; strengthening to ability of the Attorney General to retrieve information about prohibited persons.

2010, 2012

Supreme Court Ruling *McDonald et al. v. City of Chicago, Illinois, et al.* (2010): incorporated the Heller ruling on self-defence into state laws; failed to overturn the Chicago handgun restrictions.

Colorado Supreme Court ruling *Students for Concealed Carry on Campus V. Regents of the University of Colorado* (2012): this meant higher education institutions had to allow students to carry firearms on campus.